

THE STRAITS TIMES

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Kim warns of 'new path' if stalemate with US persists

He is committed to denuclearisation and ready for talks but US must take corresponding steps

Chang May Choon
South Korea Correspondent
In Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared his "strong will" towards denuclearisation in his annual New Year's Day address, but warned that he could "seek a new path" if the United States misjudges his patience.

"I am ready to sit down again with the US President any time and make efforts towards producing an

outcome that would be welcomed by the international community," he said yesterday morning in a televised address.

Clad in a suit and tie and sitting on a plush armchair, Mr Kim said bilateral ties would propel ahead if the US were to "respond by taking trustworthy and corresponding, practical action".

If the US "misjudges our patience and forces things upon us while maintaining sanctions and pressure instead of keeping the promises it made", Mr Kim said he could

be "left with no choice but to seek a new path". He did not give details.

He also urged the US to completely halt its suspended joint military exercises with ally South Korea.

Little progress has been made since Mr Kim met US President Donald Trump in Singapore in June last year.

Nuclear talks have stalled over US insistence on sanctions until the North takes concrete actions, such as submitting a list of its nuclear weapons. The North is pushing in turn for measures from the US, like the easing of economic sanctions.

The North Korean leader's annual address is scrutinised for hints of the regime's key policy directions in the year ahead.

Mr Kim, who spoke mainly about domestic economic issues in his 30-minute speech, said inter-Korea ties have entered a "completely new phase" after three summits.

Experts said his softer tone this year is a stark contrast to his address last year, when he warned of a "nuclear button" on his desk. Even the setting has changed – from a formal podium to a cosy armchair set against a wooden fireplace mantel decorated with family portraits – in an apparent bid to portray Mr Kim as a modern leader.

The North Korean leader is asking Washington to take the next step to break the stalemate, such as allowing the reopening of the joint Kaesong Industrial Complex, analysts said.

"Kim sent an 'olive branch' to Trump," said Dr Lee Seong-hyon of the Sejong Institute think-tank. "Negotiations have stalled for months, raising some doubt. Kim this time is saying that negotiation is still possible, but the ball is in Washington's court."

As the US is unlikely to back down, analysts said it is up to South Korean President Moon Jae-in – who is due to welcome Mr Kim to Seoul early this year for their fourth summit – to mediate.

Professor Kim Jae-chun of So-gang University said the key could lie in Mr Moon convincing Mr Kim to take measures such as dismantling the main Yongbyon nuclear test site, for the simultaneous lifting of some sanctions.

If not, the stalemate could continue for a longer period, he added.

South Korea's presidential office yesterday welcomed Mr Kim's address, expressing the hope that his "firm commitment will have a positive effect in resolving issues on the Korean peninsula in the new year".

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S'pore-KL meeting set for Jan 8

A meeting between the foreign ministers of Singapore and Malaysia has been set for Jan 8 in the Republic.

Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the date of the meeting in a statement yesterday, adding that there were also plans for the transport ministers of both countries to meet soon. Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah was quoted saying that the dispute over the airspace would be on the agenda.

Separately yesterday, Singapore's Ministry of Transport said it has raised concerns with Malaysia over a recent notice sent informing the aviation community of the establishment of a permanent Restricted Area for the purpose of military activities over Pasir Gudang.

Rain wreaks havoc in Indonesia, Philippines

Rescue workers searching for victims yesterday near a collapsed house following landslides in Sukabumi regency in Indonesia's West Java province.

Heavy rain in West Java and parts of the Philippines caused landslides and heavy flooding in the new year, with several people killed and others missing.

Rescue officials said at least 15 people were dead and dozens were missing in West Java.

In the Philippines' central Bicol region and Eastern Visayas, 75 people were dead and 16 missing.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Singapore Budget on Feb 18

This year's Singapore Budget statement will be delivered on Feb 18 in Parliament by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat.

The annual speech will be broadcast live on radio and television, with the full statement uploaded online after it is delivered.

This will be the fourth time Mr Heng, who became finance minister in 2015, is delivering the statement.

An ongoing exercise that began on Dec 3, to gather feedback on the Budget through various platforms, will conclude on Jan 11.

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A9


SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

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Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

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10 must-reads for today

1 Trump delays US pullout
President Donald Trump has backtracked on his abrupt order two weeks ago to withdraw US troops from Syria in 30 days, with the pullout deadline for about 2,000 troops now extended to about four months. Mr Trump's changed stance comes after he faced criticism, including from retired military leaders, that his approach to national security was reckless. **WORLD A14**



Syrian forces are deployed around the city of Manbij (above) at the request of the Kurds, who fear a Turkish attack after the US troop pullout. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

2 Kim warns of 'new path'
North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared his "strong will" towards denuclearisation in his annual New Year's Day address, but warned that he could "seek a new path" if the United States does not ease sanctions on North Korea. **TOP OF THE NEWS A1**

3 Xi's message to Trump
History shows that cooperation is the best choice for both the United States and China, Chinese President Xi Jinping told his US counterpart Donald Trump yesterday in a congratulatory message marking 40 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations. **TOP OF THE NEWS A6**

4 9 hurt in Tokyo car attack
A 21-year-old man in a rented car deliberately ploughed the vehicle into pedestrians on a famous Tokyo street in the early hours of the New Year, injuring nine people. **WORLD A10**

5 Euro's unhappy birthday
The euro turned 20 yesterday. The euro is akin to a house being built from the roof downwards, with its foundations still under construction, says associate editor Vikram Khanna (below). **OPINION A17**



6 Grading scheme delayed
A planned scheme to grade maid employment agencies and boost the professionalism of the industry has been delayed for over a year after several issues were raised during consultation sessions. **HOME B2**

7 New market complex opens
More than two years after a Jurong West market burned down, its replacement had its official opening yesterday. The new \$6.2 million two-storey market, eating house and community complex – known as Jurong Central Plaza – is located in Jurong West Street 41, the same site as its predecessor. **HOME B4**

8 Gauging risk with big data
The idea of using personal data to forecast a person's likelihood of default on a loan is being explored by some licensed moneylending firms here in what is an industry first. **BUSINESS C1**

9 Short-track coach leaves
South Korean multiple Olympic champion Chun Lee-kyung has left her post as Singapore's short-track speed skating coach, having helped the team make their Winter Games debut in Pyeongchang last year. Ann Zhang, head coach for 15 years of Australia's short-track team, is the interim coach. **SPORT C6**

10 Gig to fund music export
To help fund a new push to export home-grown music, non-profit organisation The Music Society, Singapore is holding its first fund-raising festival at *Scape The Ground Theatre on Saturday. The eight-hour show will be headlined by three acts – R&B/pop singer Sezairi, singer-songwriter and electronic music artist Linying and post-hardcore band Caracal (below). **LIFE D7**



PHOTO: LEONARD SOOSAY

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VIDEO

Bubble tea boom

Bubble tea, which started in Taiwan, is now an industry worth over \$60 billion worldwide. Thousands of shops have sprung up in recent years, in countries such as Russia, South Africa, Canada and New Zealand. <http://str.sg/bubble-tea>



VIDEO

Tailoring with technology

Four tailors save time while getting more precise measurements at work with a 3D body scanner, which cuts measuring time per customer to a few seconds. <http://str.sg/3Dscanner>

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S'pore, Malaysian foreign ministers to meet here on Jan 8

S'pore has raised concern over 'restricted area' set up over Pasir Gudang

Cara Wong

The foreign ministers of Singapore and Malaysia will meet here on Jan 8, Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday.

This follows a meeting that Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat had with Malaysian

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Monday, said the ministry in response to media queries.

Mr Teo and Mr Heng had visited Putrajaya to convey a message to Tun Dr Mahathir on behalf of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the ministry said. It added that there were also plans for both countries' transport ministers to meet soon.

The statement did not elaborate

on what would be discussed, but Bernama quoted Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah as saying the dispute over airspace would be on the agenda.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Datuk Saifuddin revealed the Dec 31 meeting between Mr Teo and Dr Mahathir. "My visit to Singapore is a continuation of the meeting yesterday," he said. "There are

several issues, but the one that must be given immediate attention is Singapore's plans for the Seletar Airport which will pass through the airspace over Pasir Gudang, Johor."

He was also quoted as saying: "We protested and declared the airspace a restricted area, and this will be a problem to Singapore. I am confident the issue will be discussed well to find a win-win solution for both countries."

In response to media queries, Singapore's Ministry of Transport yesterday said the Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia had published a Notice to Airmen on Dec 25.

The notice informed the aviation community of Malaysia's establishment of a permanent Restricted Area for the purpose of military activities over Pasir Gudang with effect from today.

"The Restricted Area being within a controlled and congested airspace will impact the existing and normal operations of aircraft transiting through the airspace," said the Ministry of Transport.

"We have raised with Malaysia our concerns over the Restricted Area's adverse impact on civil aviation. Singapore has proposed to

meet to discuss its establishment of the Restricted Area," it said.

Airspace – as well as port limits – has become a bilateral issue in recent months.

Malaysia has objected to new landing procedures at Seletar Airport that are scheduled to be enforced tomorrow. It claims the Instrument Landing System (ILS) procedures will adversely affect developments in Johor's Pasir Gudang Port, and wants to reclaim management of the airspace where Singapore has been providing air traffic services since 1974.

Singapore has pointed out that ILS – which will guide pilots landing there with ground instruments instead of relying on their visual assessment – will not pose any safety or security risks to operations at Pasir Gudang Port.

It has also said that management of the skies has nothing to do with sovereignty, but it was delegated to Singapore under an agreement with regional states, including Malaysia, in 1973, and this was approved by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

On Oct 25, Kuala Lumpur also unilaterally extended the Johor Baru

port limits such that they encroach on Singapore's territorial waters off Tuas. In response to the expanded port boundaries, Singapore extended its own port limits on Dec 6, a move that drew protest from Malaysia. Both countries had earlier agreed to meet this month.

In his New Year's message released on Monday, PM Lee said issues with Malaysia will be dealt with "calmly and constructively". He said Singapore and Malaysia must manage specific problems, however difficult, while preserving the overall relationship. The way to do so is through equality and mutual respect, upholding international commitments and the rule of law, he added.

Dr Mahathir yesterday welcomed PM Lee's remarks and said he is confident the problems can be resolved through negotiation. According to Malaysian Chinese-language newspaper China Press, Dr Mahathir addressed the matter while attending an event in Langkawi. "Our ties with Singapore are good. Currently, we are facing some problems, but these problems can be resolved through negotiations," he said.

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Smokers get warnings as Orchard goes smoke-free

Benson Ang

Orchard Road is now smoke-free, as a precinct-wide smoking ban kicked in yesterday, prohibiting smokers from lighting up in public areas except within designated smoking areas (DSAs).

Enforcement officers from the National Environment Agency (NEA), dressed in white No Smoking Zone polo T-shirts, were on patrol in the shopping district on the first day of the new year, nabbing smokers in the new prohibited areas.

These smokers were given verbal warnings and directed to the DSAs.

One smoker was Indonesian tourist Budi Mulyawan, 38, who was found smoking close to a standing litter bin in front of Ngee Ann City. He told The Straits Times: "I didn't know about the zone. I just saw a bin, and so I smoked. The officers explained to me that Orchard Road is now a no-smoking zone. If I want to smoke, I have to do it in the designated areas. I understand. No problem."

Another smoker, 23-year-old Ms Nur Fafa, was spotted smoking on a bench in front of Wisma Atria shopping mall. The Singaporean, who works in retail, told ST: "I get it that they (the authorities) want a healthier environment, but the nearest smoking area is at Ion Orchard."

"Smoke breaks are very short, and now we will spend half the time walking to the smoking area."

Over 40 DSAs are available within the Orchard Road no-smoking zone. During the initial three-month advisory period, officers will engage smokers and advise them to indulge in their habit within the DSAs.

NEA said about 30 officers will be deployed daily and this presence may be augmented by another 45 to 50 officers and volunteers on weekends and busier periods.

From April, enforcement action will be taken against all offenders.

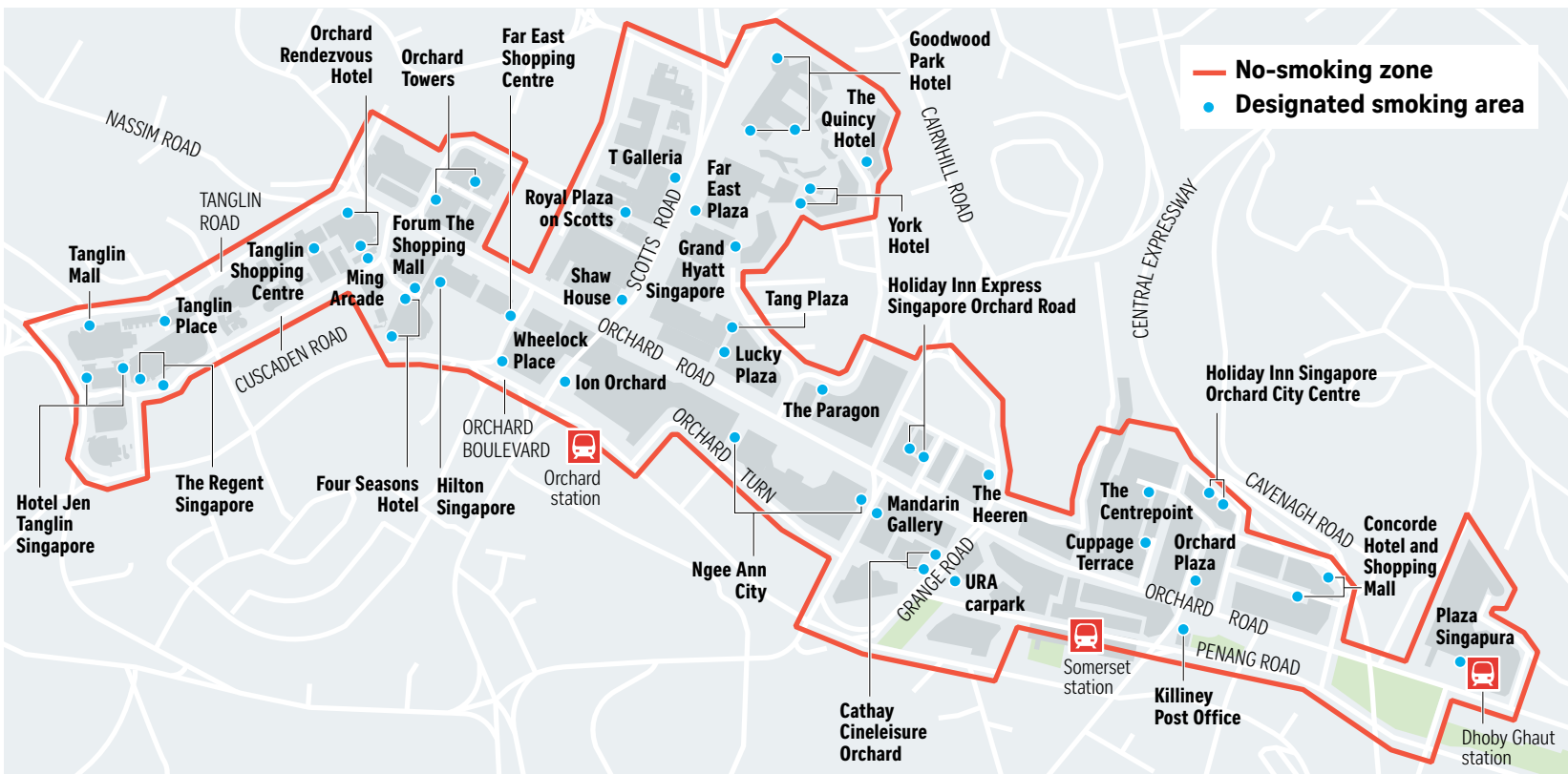
Publicity has been stepped up to increase awareness of the no-smoking zone. Signs have been placed on bins and some lamp posts within the zone. Advertisements have also been put up at selected MRT stations and bus stops.

Businesses have chipped in. The Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City Centre hotel, for example, has been actively communicating to its guests and corporate clients about Orchard Road's transformation into a no-smoking zone – and how the hotel is among the smoke-free premises – through verbal and online means.

Bins with ashtrays have been replaced with those without ashtrays, and directional signage guiding smokers to the nearest DSAs has also been put up at the hotel's side entrances.

Similarly, Royal Plaza on Scotts

No-smoking zone



Source: NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AGENCY ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

has put up a sign at the hotel's entrance to inform guests of the no-smoking zone and the nearest DSAs.

Booklets on the new regulation from NEA are also available at the front desk for guests to take away.

Experts interviewed expect the ban to lead to a reduction in second-hand smoke leading to health benefits for shoppers and visitors.

Dr Rohit Khurana, a consultant cardiologist with The Harley Street

Heart & Vascular Centre at Gleneagles Hospital, said second-hand smoke contains thousands of toxic chemicals, some of which are carcinogenic. Exposure can lead to short-term effects such as the exacerbation of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as more frequent and severe asthma attacks, which children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to.

Long-term exposure can lead to an

increased incidence of coronary heart and vascular disease, which can result in heart attacks and strokes, as well as lung cancer, he said.

Associate Professor Alex Cook, vice-dean of research at the National University of Singapore's Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, said there is clear evidence linking smoking bans to improved cardiovascular health outcomes and fewer deaths from smoking-related

illnesses. The greatest health effects of a ban are also likely to result from a denormalisation of cigarette use, he added.

The number of fines imposed for smoking in prohibited areas has been increasing in recent years, from about 19,000 in 2016 to more than 22,000 a year later and 28,000 in the first 11 months of 2018.

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Ban on smoking in Malaysian eateries takes effect

PETALING JAYA • It's all systems go for the nationwide smoking ban at all eateries and restaurants in Malaysia that started yesterday.

Malaysian Health Minister Dzulkifly Ahmad said enforcement officers would focus more on educating the public for now. "These policies will take time to implement, so we want to step up awareness first," he said.

He reiterated that for the first six months, Health Ministry officers would not issue fines but take note of repeat offenders. "The state

health departments will also be working with local councils to enforce the smoking ban," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkifly also urged eatery owners to advise those smoking on their premises to refrain from doing so.

"There has been a lot of attention on the campaign, and the response from the public has been overwhelming," he said.

Despite the detractors, most people were supportive of the ban as smoking would affect vulnerable groups such as young children and

pregnant women, he added.

Dr Dzulkifly's deputy, Dr Lee Boon Chye, said the ministry's 5,008 health officers and assistant health officers would start making their rounds.

To keep the momentum going throughout the year, Dr Lee said the most important thing would be to keep the enforcement and awareness campaign consistent.

He noted that although the ban was slated to take effect only from yesterday, the ministry has seen a good response from the public.

"In fact, if you go to any restaurant now, there is hardly anyone smoking inside, whether the outlet is air-conditioned or not," he said.

Social media campaigns to spread awareness of the smoking ban would continue, said Dr Lee. "On top of these, we will also go to the ground to drive home the message."

Last October, the ministry announced that smoking would be banned in all restaurants, coffee shops and hawkers centres – even open-air eateries – nationwide

starting this year.

Those caught smoking in prohibited areas will be fined up to RM10,000 (S\$3,300) or face two years' jail, while eateries found to have allowed customers to light up will be slapped with a maximum fine of RM2,500.

Smokers are, however, permitted to light up 3m away from the establishments. Besides tobacco products, vape and shisha with nicotine have also been included in the ban.

Eatery operators are required to display prominently at least a 40cm x 50cm "no-smoking" poster on their premises. Facilities for smokers, such as smoking rooms and ashtrays, are not allowed.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Heng to present Budget statement on Feb 18

Timothy Goh

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat will deliver the 2019 Budget statement in Parliament on Feb 18. It will be the fourth time Mr Heng – who took over as finance minister in 2015 – is delivering the Budget statement.

There will be live television and radio coverage of the statement, and a live webcast will be available on the Singapore Budget website. The full statement will be uploaded on the website after it has been delivered, said the Ministry of Finance (MOF) yesterday.

Real-time updates of key announcements will also be available on MOF's Facebook page and Twitter account.

Meanwhile, the ongoing Budget feedback exercise, which began on Dec 3 last year, will conclude on Jan 11. Singaporeans have been providing their views throughout the exercise through different platforms, said MOF.

These include Reach's Budget 2019 microsite and e-mail, as well as Reach's Listening Points, which are open booths set up in easily accessible locations for people to provide their feedback.

Two more Listening Points will be set up this month. The first will be at Ngee Ann Polytechnic outside Makan Place next Tuesday from 11.30am to 2.30pm. The second will be at the Li Ka Shing Library of Singapore Management University on Jan 10 from 11.30am to 2.30pm.

Singaporeans can also submit their recommendations via the Singapore Budget website, the Reach Budget microsite and the Reach Singapore Facebook page.

They can also provide feedback through the Reach Singapore Twitter account @REACH_Singapore using the hashtag #SGBudget2019, or e-mail Reach at reach@reach.gov.sg.

Alternatively, they can call Reach's toll-free hotline on 1800-353-5555 from 8.30am to 5.45pm on weekdays, or SMS Reach on 9773-2587.

In the last Budget, Mr Heng made several announcements, including raising the goods and services tax (GST) by 2 percentage points. The increased GST will be implemented some time between 2021 and 2025.

Other measures included enhancements to the Proximity Housing Grant for HDB home buyers who want to live with or near their parents or children, and a one-off "hongbao" of up to \$300 from the previous year's bumper Budget surplus. He also announced an increase in the top marginal Buyer's Stamp Duty from 3 per cent to 4 per cent.

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It will be the fourth time Mr Heng – who took over as finance minister in 2015 – is delivering the Budget statement.

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New Year messages

Xi to Trump: Cooperation best choice for US and China

Chinese President says bilateral relations have made historic progress in past 40 years

ADVANCING SINO-U.S. TIES

I attach great importance to the development of China-US relations and am willing to work with President Trump to summarise the experience of the development of China-US relations and implement the consensus we have reached in a joint effort to advance China-US relations featuring coordination, cooperation and stability so as to better benefit the two peoples as well as the people of the rest of the world.



CHINESE PRESIDENT XI JINPING

BEIJING • History shows that cooperation is the best choice for both China and the United States, Chinese President Xi Jinping told US President Donald Trump in a congratulatory message yesterday to mark 40 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations.

The two countries agreed last month to a 90-day temporary ceasefire in their bitter trade war to give them time to hold fresh talks to try and end a dispute that has seen them impose increasingly severe tariffs on each other's goods.

In his message to Mr Trump, Mr Xi said China-US relations have experienced ups and downs but have made historic progress over the past four decades, state news agency Xinhua said.

This has brought huge benefits to the two peoples and contributed greatly to world peace, stability and prosperity, Mr Xi added. "History has proved that cooperation is the best choice for both sides," he said.

Sino-US relations are at an important stage, he added.

"I attach great importance to the development of China-US relations and am willing to work with President Trump to summarise the experience of the development of China-US relations and implement the consensus we have reached in a



US President Donald Trump with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a visit to Beijing in 2017. In his congratulatory message to Mr Xi yesterday, Mr Trump said it was his priority to promote cooperative and constructive US-China relations. The two leaders also had a phone conversation last weekend. PHOTO: REUTERS

joint effort to advance China-US relations featuring coordination, cooperation and stability so as to better benefit the two peoples as well as the people of the rest of the world," Mr Xi said.

Mr Trump sent his own congratulatory message in return, saying it was his priority to promote cooperative and constructive US-China relations, Xinhua added.

Mr Xi and Mr Trump also spoke by telephone at the weekend. Mr Trump said he had a "long and very good call" with Mr Xi and that a possible trade deal between the US and China was progressing well.

Both countries have made plans for face-to-face consultations over trade this month, China's Commerce Ministry said last week.

Xinhua, in a commentary, said it was only natural the two countries would have disagreements and encounter problems, considering their "different social systems, development paths and historical and cultural backgrounds". "At a time when the world is undergoing unprecedentedly profound changes and is fraught with risks and uncertainties, the global community expects even closer collaboration between the two largest economies," it said.

This year marks the 70th year since the founding of the People's Republic of China. The anniversary underscores the urgency Mr Xi faces in turning around stalled growth and investor confidence, while pushing forward an agenda of political reform that will

strengthen his power.

In his annual New Year's Eve address on Monday, Mr Xi urged self-reliance amid change "unseen in 100 years", as the country faced an economic slowdown and a more confrontational US.

But he also stressed China's capacity to weather the storm, citing a series of industrial and technological achievements last year.

Mr Xi said the government would keep growth from slowing too quickly and follow through on a tax cut as part of an effort "to ease the burden on enterprises".

"Despite all sorts of risks and challenges, we pushed our economy towards high-quality development, sped up the replacement of the old drivers of growth, and kept the ma-

jor economic indicators within a reasonable range."

The government launched more than 100 reform measures last year and stepped up efforts to improve standards of living. "Our people are the country's solid foundation and our main source of confidence to govern," Mr Xi said.

A little less than a year since he scrapped term limits, clearing the path towards his indefinite rule, Mr Xi has seen his major initiatives – notably the Belt and Road trade and infrastructure programme – draw international backlash amid the unprecedented trade war with the US.

China's growth is still slowing as it transitions from a high-growth, export-led model to a consumer-focused state. REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

Taiwan urges China to use peaceful means to resolve differences

TAIPEI • China must use peaceful means to resolve its differences with Taiwan and respect its democratic values, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said yesterday, ahead of a major speech about the island by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing.

China has heaped pressure on Ms Tsai since she took office in 2016, cutting off dialogue, whittling down Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies and forcing foreign airlines to list Taiwan as part of China on their websites.

China fears she wishes to push for Taiwan's formal independence, though Ms Tsai says she wants to maintain the status quo. Beijing has regularly sent military aircraft and ships to circle the island on drills.

Taiwan is gearing up for presidential elections in a year's time. Ms Tsai's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party suffered stinging losses to the China-friendly Kuomintang in mayoral and local elections in November last year.

In a New Year's address at the presidential office in Taipei, Ms Tsai said the two sides of the Tai-

wan Strait needed a pragmatic understanding of the basic differences that existed between them in terms of values and political systems.

"I would like to call on China to face squarely the reality of the existence of the Republic of China on Taiwan," Ms Tsai said, referring to the island's formal name.

China "must respect the insistence of 23 million people on freedom and democracy, and must use peaceful, on-parity means to handle our differences", she added.

China's interference in the island's political and social development is Taiwan's biggest challenge at the moment, Ms Tsai said.

China denies any interference in Taiwan's internal affairs.

China views Taiwan as a wayward province, to be brought under its control by force if needed, with no right to international recognition as a separate political entity.

Mr Liu Jieyi, head of China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said in his New Year's message that Beijing had not wavered last year in the face of "deliberate provocations" from Taiwan's government.

"Although the way ahead won't



In her New Year's address, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said the two sides of the Taiwan Strait needed a pragmatic understanding of the basic differences that existed between them in terms of values and political systems. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

all be plain sailing, we have the confidence and the ability to vanquish risks and challenges," he said.

Today, Mr Xi will give a speech to mark 40 years since a key policy statement that eventually led to a thaw in relations with Taiwan.

On Jan 1, 1979, China declared an

end to what had been routine artillery bombardment of Taiwan-controlled offshore islands close to China and offered to open up communications between the two sides, after decades of hostility.

Chiang Kai-shek fled with defeated Nationalist forces to Taiwan

in December 1949 after losing a civil war to the communists. Despite the deep business, cultural and personal links that exist today, no peace treaty or formal end to hostilities has been signed. REUTERS

SEE WORLD A13

Xi and Putin agree to boost cooperation

BEIJING • Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin have agreed to use the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries this year as an opportunity to promote bilateral ties.

They also expressed their hopes of further strengthening pragmatic cooperation between China and Russia as they exchanged New Year congratulatory letters.

Calling 2018 a year of special significance in the history of Sino-Russian relations, Mr Xi said the two countries' relationship entered a new era as they both completed their own important domestic political agendas.

Mr Xi said in the message that high-level exchanges between China and Russia are even closer, and that pragmatic cooperation in various fields has achieved fruitful outcomes. Political mutual trust has also intensified.

The two countries also actively coordinate in international and regional affairs and play an important and constructive role in safeguarding international justice and world peace and stability, he added.

In the new year, Mr Xi said, he stands ready to work with Mr Putin to continue to guide bilateral ties and push for cooperation between both nations to make new progress so as to further benefit the countries and their peoples.

In his message, Mr Putin said the Russia-China comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination reached an unprecedented high point last year – the two sides carried out meaningful political dialogue, bilateral trade volume greatly increased, and coordination in the resolution of major regional and global issues was productive.

He trusts the two sides will use the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties as an opportunity to continue to develop effective collaboration in bilateral and multilateral affairs.

Russian Ambassador to China Andrei Denisov said last week that Mr Putin will be a key guest and participant in the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, to be held in Beijing in April. Mr Xi will also visit Russia this year.

China's Foreign Ministry confirmed last Wednesday that the two sides are making preparations for a series of high-level talks regarding the upcoming exchanges. CHINA DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

UK can turn corner with Brexit vote: May

LONDON • Prime Minister Theresa May said in her New Year's address that Britain can turn a corner this year and move forward with optimism – if Parliament backs her Brexit deal.

"New Year is a time to look ahead and in 2019 the UK will start a new chapter," she said, as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union on March 29.

"The Brexit deal I have negotiated delivers on the vote of the British people and in the next few weeks, MPs will have an important decision to make. If Parliament backs a deal, Britain can turn a corner."

Most British lawmakers do not back the deal Mrs May reached with the EU. They are due to debate the Britain-EU withdrawal agreement next Wednesday, before vot-



British Prime Minister Theresa May says Britain will start a new chapter once her Brexit deal gets the nod from Parliament.

ing the following week.

The 2016 referendum on leaving the EU was "divisive", Mrs May said, "but we all want the best for our country and 2019 can be the year we put our differences aside and move forward together, into a strong new relationship with our European neighbours and out into the world as a globally trading nation".

Once Britain leaves the EU, the Conservative government can focus its energy on boosting the

economy, opening up new markets and building homes, she added, while a skills-based immigration system would replace the free movement of EU migrants.

"Together, I believe we can start a new chapter with optimism and hope," Mrs May said.

A spokesman for her Downing Street office said discussions between London and Brussels had continued, and Mrs May was working on getting "legal and political assurances".

In a message posted on Twitter, Mr Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition Labour Party, denounced the Conservative Party's handling of Brexit: "Eight years of damaging Tory failure has left us with a divided country where millions are struggling to make ends meet."

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New Year festivities



Fireworks exploding over the iconic London Eye in central London, marking the beginning of the new year. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



Rio de Janeiro's famed hilltop Christ the Redeemer statue coming to life in 3D colour during the fireworks spectacle. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Merrymakers braving the pouring rain to ring in the new year at New York's Times Square amid fireworks and cheer. PHOTO: REUTERS

Wave of celebrations across the globe

Fireworks and festivities spread from Asia to Europe and Americas

RIO DE JANEIRO • Revellers welcomed 2019 yesterday with fireworks displays and festivities as a celebratory wave swept westwards across the globe from Asia to Europe and the Americas, putting to bed a tumultuous 2018.

In Rio de Janeiro, the city's famed hilltop Christ the Redeemer statue briefly came to colourful 3D life through light projections as it peered over Copacabana Beach, where pyrotechnics lit up more than two million white-clad Brazilians dancing to free concerts.

The beach was lit up with hundreds of thousands of mobile phone screens as the massive crowd recorded the fireworks spectacle.

New York's Times Square also

erupted with fireworks and cheers at the stroke of midnight yesterday, as thousands of hardy merrymakers braved pouring rain and watched the glowing New Year's Eve ball complete its midnight descent to mark the start of 2019.

Helping to keep spirits high was a slate of performers, including Christina Aguilera, New Kids on the Block and Sting, who entertained the resilient crowd.

The global partying had kicked off on Sydney's waterfront with the Australian city's biggest fireworks display, thrilling 1.5 million people.

It then moved on to Hong Kong, where hundreds of thousands packed streets along Victoria Harbour for a spectacular 10-minute show that illuminated the night.

In Jakarta, more than 500 couples tied the knot in a free mass wedding organised by the government to mark the arrival of a new year. But

Ring in 2019 across time zones



<http://str.sg/SThella2019>

fireworks shows were cancelled out of respect for victims of a Dec 22 tsunami that killed more than 400 people.

In Japan, locals flocked to temples to ring in 2019, as US boxing superstar Floyd Mayweather came

out of retirement to beat Japanese kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa in a multimillion-dollar exhibition bout outside Tokyo.

In Dubai, fireworks lit up the sky over the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, to the delight of onlookers, while nearby Ras al-Khaima sought to enter the Guinness Book of Records with the world's longest fireworks show.

Russia saw in the new year over several time zones. Concerts and light shows featured in Moscow city parks, and more than 1,000 ice rinks opened for merrymakers.

In Paris, "fraternity" themed fireworks and a light show were held on the Champs-Elysees, with a few "yellow vest" anti-government protesters mingling joyfully with the 300,000-strong crowd.

In Berlin, music lovers partied at the Brandenburg Gate.

London ushered in the new year by celebrating its relationship with Europe, despite Britain's impending departure from the European Union. Mayor Sadiq Khan said the capital would remain "outward looking" after Brexit.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Spectacular fireworks, music and dance at Marina Bay

Lim Min Zhang

Singapore ushered in the new year with a spectacular seven-minute fireworks display at Marina Bay as the clock struck midnight on Dec 31.

More than 500,000 revellers thronged the bay area and Civic District despite the light rain to catch the festivities, such as rides and games at the Prudential carnival, and live performances at the Esplanade Outdoor Theatre.

The show at The Float @ Marina Bay culminated in an hour-long fireworks musical display involving pyrotechnics, lights, and acts by taiko drummers, dancers and fire performers. The show was the international debut of the Star Island production by Japan's top entertainment group Aves.

At The Promontory, visitors were treated to live performances by local artists such as Taufik Batisah, Gentle Bones and Joanna Dong.

By 7pm, many had lined the area outside the Esplanade and on the Esplanade Bridge to secure a spot to catch the fireworks.

Singapore Polytechnic student Lee Kian Tat, 18, took along an umbrella and a towel after he was caught in the rain at the Gardens by the Bay area in 2017.

"I'm not deterred by the rain and will stay throughout for the shot I want," said Mr Lee, who studies visual effects and motion graphics.

Ms Nur Isha Tomeng, 30, was at the Marina Bay countdown for the first time. She was there with her future sister-in-law Khairiyah Rahman, 24.

Ms Nur Isha, a service crew member in the food and beverage industry, said her wish for 2019 was to have her first child with her husband of seven years, as well as happiness for Ms Khairiyah, who will be getting married in November.

Tourist Sanjay Rajore, 61, a retired nuclear scientist from India, was attending his first countdown in Singapore. He was there with his wife, 61, a housewife, and two engineer daughters aged 24 and 33.

Mr Rajore said: "I chose Singapore to spend the New Year count-



down as it's a beautiful place and a modern city. In the new year, I'm hoping to see more of Asia."

After the countdown, more than 200 volunteers went around the Marina Bay and Civic District areas to remind the public to pick up their own trash. They were from the Lions Club of Singapore Mandarin and the National Environment Agency's litter-free ambassadors programme.

A Public Hygiene Council spokesman said: "The focus this year is more on engaging the public, and less on doing clean-up."

"The goal is to create a culture where everyone takes ownership of keeping public spaces clean. In so doing, we create a better living environment for all."

Since 2017, the council, which coordinates the anti-littering effort, has stopped giving out figures for

WORTH THE WAIT

I'm not deterred by the rain and will stay throughout for the shot I want.



MR LEE KIAN TAT, a Singapore Polytechnic student, who came prepared to capture good images of the fireworks.

CHOICE PLACE FOR COUNTDOWN

I chose Singapore to spend the New Year countdown as it's a beautiful place and a modern city.



MR SANJAY RAJORE, a retired nuclear scientist from India who was attending his first countdown in Singapore, on holidaying here.

the amount of trash collected after countdowns.

The countdown celebrations at Marina Bay were organised by the Urban Redevelopment Authority, in collaboration with various agencies and event partners.

The area came alive even before New Year's Eve, with colourful light projections on landmarks such as the Merlion and the ArtScience Museum, as part of this year's focus on the community.

For instance, the facade of The Fullerton Hotel was illuminated nightly since Dec 26 with artworks by beneficiaries of the Association for Persons with Special Needs and the Metta Welfare Association.

A police drone hovering over the area was part of the beefed-up police presence for the event.

Some 700 police officers were deployed, including officers from the

Special Operations Command and Emergency Response Teams.

The unmanned aerial vehicle featured blinkers, searchlights and an audio warning system. It provided a higher-plane view of the events for better crowd control.

The Marina Bay celebrations were among a number of countdown parties islandwide.

At Our Tampines Hub, some 100,000 people who attended the festivities were treated to a movie marathon, an 80m-long inflatable playground, and flame waves, laser and fireworks displays.

Another countdown event, at Heartbeat@Bedok, set a new Singapore record for the "largest silent disco", with some 1,000 residents dancing while wearing wireless headphones.

mzlim@sph.com.sg

The Marina Bay area lit up with fireworks, as seen from Marina Bay Sands SkyPark, to welcome 2019. More than 500,000 revellers thronged the bay area and Civic District to catch the festivities, which included carnival rides, games and live performances. Other countdown celebrations also took place around the island. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Philippines, Indonesia reel from flash floods, landslides

Scores dead as heavy rain triggers disasters and hampers search for many who are missing

MANILA/JAKARTA • Landslides and flash floods triggered by heavy rain have killed dozens of people in the Philippines and western Indonesia, with rescuers searching for dozens more who were missing yesterday.

In the Philippines' Bicol region and Eastern Visayas, 75 people were dead and 16 others missing, said the Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). At least 12 people were injured.

More than 45,000 families or nearly 192,000 people from 457 villages in these central and northern Philippine regions were affected by the tropical depression that hit land last Saturday.

The storms weakened into a low-pressure area after hitting land, but continued to dump days of heavy rain that triggered the landslides and massive flooding.

NDRRMC spokesman Edgar Posadas said 59 of the deaths were from the Bicol region, 13 from Eastern Visayas in the central Philippines, and three others from nearby regions. "The deaths were mostly due to landslides," he added.

Mr Posadas said many roads were rendered impassable due to flooding and landslides. The heavy rain also caused power outages and the cancellation of 36 flights.

The Manila government is now in the process of restoring damaged electric lines and roads, he added.

The most affected provinces, such as Albay, Camarines Sur, Camarines Norte and Sorsogon, are now placed under a state of calamity. This will allow the fast release of relief funds, while price controls will be imposed on basic necessities and prime commodities.

In Indonesia, a landslide triggered by heavy rain left at least 15 people dead and dozens missing in West Java province. The landslide occurred shortly before sunset on Monday.

Search and rescue teams said they have found 15 people dead and are scouring the area for at least 25 missing.

Pouring rain, power cuts and rough roads are preventing heavy machinery from accessing the area in Sukabumi regency, national disaster management agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said yesterday.

"Relief efforts have also been hampered by a lot of people who want to get to the disaster," he added. "The roads are narrow, which has caused rescue teams, logistics and ambulances to be stuck in traffic jams."

The search operation was halted for the night but will resume today. Four people have been injured in the disaster and 60 others evacuated from the area, Dr Sutopo said.

Landslides are common in Indonesia, a vast tropical archipelago prone to natural disasters and torrential downpours.

Over 20 people died last October

when flash floods and landslides hit several provinces on Sumatra island in western Indonesia.

In June 2016, nearly 50 people died when floods and landslides struck Central Java province. XINHUA, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



A road damaged by floods in the town of Bulan in the Philippines' Sorsogon province on Monday. More than 45,000 families or nearly 192,000 people from 457 villages in the country's central and northern regions were affected by the tropical storm that hit land last Saturday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

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CHALLENGES

Relief efforts have also been hampered by a lot of people who want to get to the disaster. The roads are narrow, which has caused rescue teams, logistics and ambulances to be stuck in traffic jams.



DR SUTOPO PURWO NUGROHO, spokesman for Indonesia's national disaster management agency.



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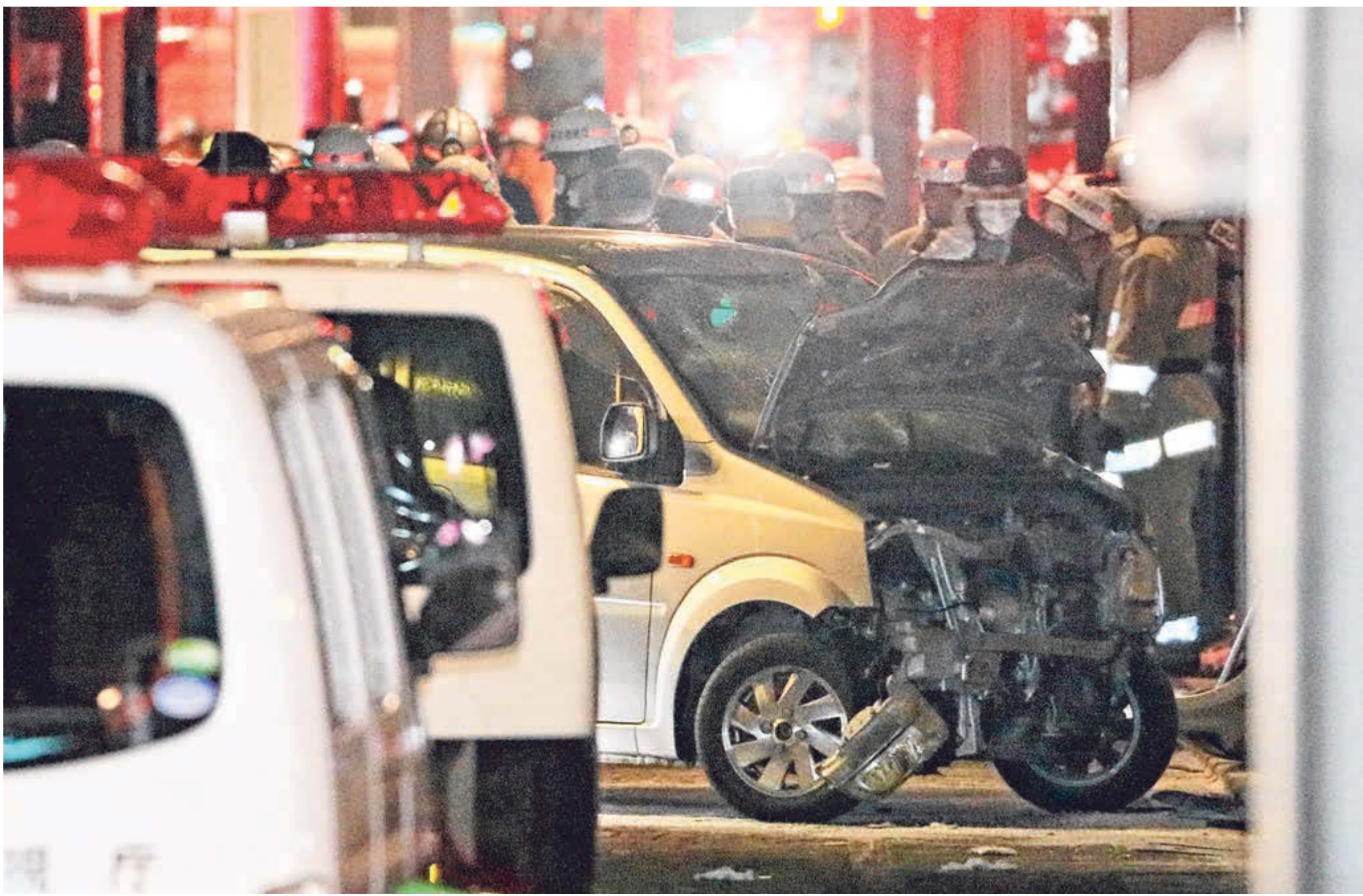
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Police inspecting the rented car that Kazuhiro Kusakabe drove into a group of pedestrians in Harajuku's Takeshita Street. The car came to a stop when Kusakabe crashed into a building. It bore an Osaka licence plate and carried a tank with 20 litres of kerosene which Kusakabe was planning to use to set the vehicle on fire. PHOTO: AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Driver ploughs into crowd ushering in New Year in Tokyo

21-year-old man arrested for attempted murder in incident which injured nine

Walter Sim
Japan Correspondent
In Tokyo

In a rare instance of rampage in Japan, a 21-year-old man in a rented

car deliberately ploughed into pedestrians on a famous Tokyo street, which was closed to vehicles for the New Year, injuring nine people.

Kazuhiro Kusakabe, who was arrested for attempted murder, confessed to having the intent to kill

when he rammed his car through the crowd in Harajuku's Takeshita Street at 12.10am on Tuesday, said the Tokyo Metropolitan Police.

At first, Kusakabe claimed that he wanted to commit "an act of terror" but later said he was "acting in retaliation for the death penalty system". He also said there was no need for him "to make any excuses for his action".

Kusakabe, whose occupation is



One of the spots the car hit. The suspect drove about a third of the way along the street that was closed to vehicles at that time. PHOTO: REUTERS

unknown, knocked down eight men aged between 19 and 51 as he drove about a third of the way along the 350m street. He came to a stop when he crashed the rented vehicle

into a building. The vehicle bore an Osaka licence plate.

One of those injured, a 19-year-old undergraduate, remains unconscious in critical condition in hospi-

tal. Four others suffered severe injuries such as fractures and head injuries, while the remaining three suffered minor bruises.

The ninth victim, a 19-year-old man, was assaulted by Kusakabe after he fled on foot. He was arrested 20 minutes later at the nearby Yoyogi Park.

Takeshita Street, regarded as the epicentre of Tokyo's eccentric youth culture, had been closed to all vehicles from 10pm on Monday to 5am yesterday as heavy foot traffic was expected to and from the nearby Meiji Jingu, a major shrine where Japanese go to pray for good luck in the New Year.

Kusakabe reportedly told the police that he had planned his attack on the Meiji Shrine area, but had been deterred by massive road blocks in the area.

A tank with 20 litres of kerosene was also found inside the rented car, which he said was intended to be used to set the vehicle ablaze after the rampage.

Narrow Takeshita Street is typically bustling with tourists during the day but was relatively sparse when Kusakabe drove through it, local media reported.

One eyewitness told public broadcaster NHK of witnessing a "ghastly scene" with people collapsing on the street.

Another passer-by spoke of a lucky escape, saying: "It scares me knowing that I'd have been hit if the attack had happened five minutes later."

It remains unclear if Kusakabe's intent was to make a statement against the death penalty in general, or if he was targeting any particular execution.

Japan executed 15 prisoners last year. Most of those executed, or 13, were cultists of the Aum Shinrikyo group that was responsible for the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo Metro during morning rush hour, which killed 13 and sickened thousands of others.

The Mainichi daily cited investigative sources as saying that they were looking into any connection between Kusakabe and the Aum Shinrikyo cult.

Meanwhile in Germany, police have detained a 50-year-old man on suspicion of ramming his car into a crowd of people after midnight on New Year's Eve at a crowded plaza in the north-western town of Bottrop.

Four people were injured in what the authorities say may have been a xenophobic attack, Reuters reported.

People of Syrian and Afghan origin were among those injured, a police spokesman said.

According to a statement by police and prosecutors yesterday, the man made racist comments when he was later arrested. "In addition, investigators have preliminary information about a mental illness of the driver," the statement said.

waltsim@sph.com.sg

British police treating Manchester knife attack as terrorist investigation

MANCHESTER • British police confirmed yesterday that they were treating a stabbing attack which injured three people at Manchester's Victoria train station as a terrorist investigation, and were searching an address in the Cheetham Hill area of the city.

"We are treating this as a terrorist investigation," Chief Constable Ian Hopkins told reporters.

Monday's incident, classified as critical, is being investigated by the counter-terrorism police.

Officials said that a man and a woman, both in their 50s, and a police officer were treated for knife injuries following the stabbings.

Witness Sam Clack, 38, a BBC radio producer, yesterday said he heard the suspect shouting "Allah" before and during the attack. He quoted the suspect as saying: "As long as you keep bombing other countries, this sort of s*** is going to keep happening."

The male suspect has been arrested on suspicion of attempted murder, said the police.

The woman suffered injuries to her face and abdomen, and the

man was wounded in the abdomen, while a British Transport Police officer sustained a stab wound to the shoulder. Their injuries were described as serious but not life threatening. The two members of the public were taken to hospital.

The incident happened at around 8.50pm, when many revellers would have been out enjoying New Year's Eve celebrations across the city.

Mr Clack said: "I just heard this most blood-curdling scream and looked down the platform."

"He came towards me. I looked down and saw he had a kitchen knife with a black handle with a good 12-inch (30cm) blade. It was just fear, pure fear."

Mr Clack said police officers used a stun gun and pepper spray on the suspect who had been resisting arrest, before "six or seven" officers jumped on the man.

An attack in May 2017 killed 22 people and wounded 139 at a concert in Manchester by US singer Ariana Grande.

REUTERS, AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Police gathering evidence at the site of Monday's blast outside a shopping mall in Cotabato city, southern Philippines. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



Two killed in bombing in troubled southern Philippines

COTABATO (Philippines) • Two people were killed and about 35 others wounded after a bomb went off outside a shopping mall in the southern Philippine city of Cotabato, police said yesterday.

Monday's explosion prompted officers to search the mall, leading to the discovery of another suspected bomb which they de-

stroyed, said police spokesman Chief Inspector Rowell Zafra.

A female street vendor and one man were killed, while many of the injured were people shopping for the New Year. Three of the wounded were in critical condition.

Windows of buildings in the vicinity of the mall were shattered by the explosion, eyewitnesses said.

Investigators could not yet say what kind of bomb was used. Local army commander Cirilito Sobejana told ABS-CBN television that an individual was seen carrying a box which he left in front of the mall. It exploded a few seconds later.

Major-General Sobejana said the bomb had the signature of a "Daesh

group", referring to militants who have declared allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The southern part of the largely Catholic Philippines has been rocked for decades by violent Muslim separatist insurgent groups including militants linked to ISIS.

More than 100,000 lives have been claimed by the rebellion, according to a government count.

The region has also suffered from banditry, bloody clan feuds and communist guerilla activity.

Bombs went off in Isulan town, 77km south of Cotabato, killing at least three people, last August and September. The authorities said the main suspect in these blasts was the pro-ISIS Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters armed group.

Monday's bombing came ahead of a plebiscite in the southern Philippines this month for the creation of a Muslim autonomous area as part of an attempt to end the separatist insurgency. Many of the ISIS-linked groups have rejected these peace efforts.

Cotabato Mayor Cynthia Sayadi said that despite the bombing, "we will try to assure the people that... their right to vote (in the plebiscite) will be protected".

President Rodrigo Duterte put the southern Mindanao region under martial rule until the end of last year after pro-ISIS militants seized the city of Marawi in 2017. Martial law has been extended to the end of this year. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Mahathir's New Year wish: Wipe out corruption

Malaysian PM says making country 'clean' is very important mission for his government

PUTRAJAYA • Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said he has one big wish for the new year – for the new Malaysian government to wipe out corruption.

Making the country “clean” is a very important mission for the seven-month-old Pakatan Harapan (PH) administration, as the previous government collapsed due to corruption and abuse of power, he told Sin Chew Daily in an interview.

“We have to avoid corruption. We will act against those who are involved, even if they are holding high positions,” he said.

Tun Dr Mahathir said everyone should abide by the law, from the Malay rulers down to regular citizens, because the entire system would be damaged without rule of law.

The interview was conducted on Monday, the last day of 2018.

Now 93, Dr Mahathir became Prime Minister in May last year for the second time, after PH unexpectedly knocked out the Barisan Nasional (BN) government that had ruled Malaysia for 61 years.

Dr Mahathir was prime minister for 22 years between 1981 and

2003, when Malaysia grew at its fastest pace and complaints about corruption rose.

“The government is occupied with restoring the administration and to carry out reform,” he said.

The Premier said his government has delivered on many issues in the last seven months, but faces many other challenges including a smooth execution of PH policy and cleaning up the government to build a “new Malaysia”.

Dr Mahathir's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) last week faced criticism after one of its vice-presidents demanded that govern-

ment contracts be channelled to its grassroots leaders to strengthen their finances.

The Prime Minister said the new government has discarded the practice of handing out goodies to party members like BN did in the past such as awarding contracts to cronies or appointing party members to official positions.

But many in PPBM are not used to these new practices, he said, adding that the administration is firm on its battle against corruption and abuse.

“In the past, we saw that the law and enforcement agencies in charge of corruption were unable to stop bribery in the government. But now we are going all out against corruption,” he said. “Even if we have not totally eradicated graft, at



Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said everyone should abide by the law, from the Malay rulers down to regular citizens. ST FILE PHOTO

NEW MALAYSIA

In the past, we saw that the law and enforcement agencies in charge of corruption were unable to stop bribery in the government. But now we are going all out against corruption. Even if we have not totally eradicated graft, at least corruption has been reduced. This is a new Malaysia.



MALAYSIA PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

least corruption has been reduced. This is a new Malaysia.”

He admitted that some PPBM members have been unable to accept the transparency practised by the new government.

“Those who have helped us to secure victory now feel that they have been neglected. I feel this is unfair

to them,” Dr Mahathir said.

“If they can deliver (in government contracts), those who qualify should be arranged to be placed at the right position. But not the practice of giving them goodies like Umno such as awarding them contracts. This is not allowed.”

Dr Mahathir did not deny that

Malaysia had corruption issues when he was the prime minister for 22 years.

“But the corruption did not take place at the prime minister level but lower-ranking government officials. Now we are going to remove them,” he said.

SIN CHEW DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Keep cool, Wan Azizah tells PKR's deputy chief Azmin

KUALA LUMPUR • Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah Wan Ismail has called on Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) leader Azmin Ali to remain calm in a public spat with her husband Anwar Ibrahim.

PKR's deputy president Datuk Seri Azmin last week criticised party president Datuk Seri Anwar for making several internal appointments that he feared could worsen the party's factional infighting.

The Anwar-Azmin spat is being closely watched as ruling party PKR has 50 MPs, the biggest number of lawmakers in Malaysia's Parliament, and there is speculation about changing political loyalties and possible defections.

“Keep cool, cool,” Dr Wan Azizah told the media on Monday evening, when asked to comment on the spat between the two PKR leaders.

“I think (Azmin should) let the new president lead the party. We have actually chosen him (to lead). And as he said, it is the prerogative of the president, who is also the unity factor in the party,” she said.

Dr Wan Azizah was PKR's president since its founding in 1999, passing the baton to her husband only in August last year.

Economic Affairs Minister Azmin issued a statement last Saturday urging Mr Anwar to review recent appointments to PKR's central leadership council, saying they did not reflect the members' principle of “fair and just representation” and would not help the party to move forward.

In response, Mr Anwar said although his deputy was entitled to his personal views, party matters should be discussed within the organisation. He also defended his move to appoint vice-presidents to the council, adding to those elected in the November party polls.

Among other issues, Mr Azmin and his faction in PKR are said to be unhappy with Mr Anwar appointing Mr Rafizi Ramli as one of the party's new vice-presidents.

Mr Azmin had in November retained his deputy presidency of PKR after fending off a strong challenge from Mr Rafizi.

Dr Wan Azizah, when asked about reports that Mr Azmin might challenge Mr Anwar for the party's presidency, said anybody could do that. “Anybody can challenge (Anwar). I remember, even in Umno in the past (someone) challenged (former Umno president) Datuk Onn Jaafar. It happens in any political party.” THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

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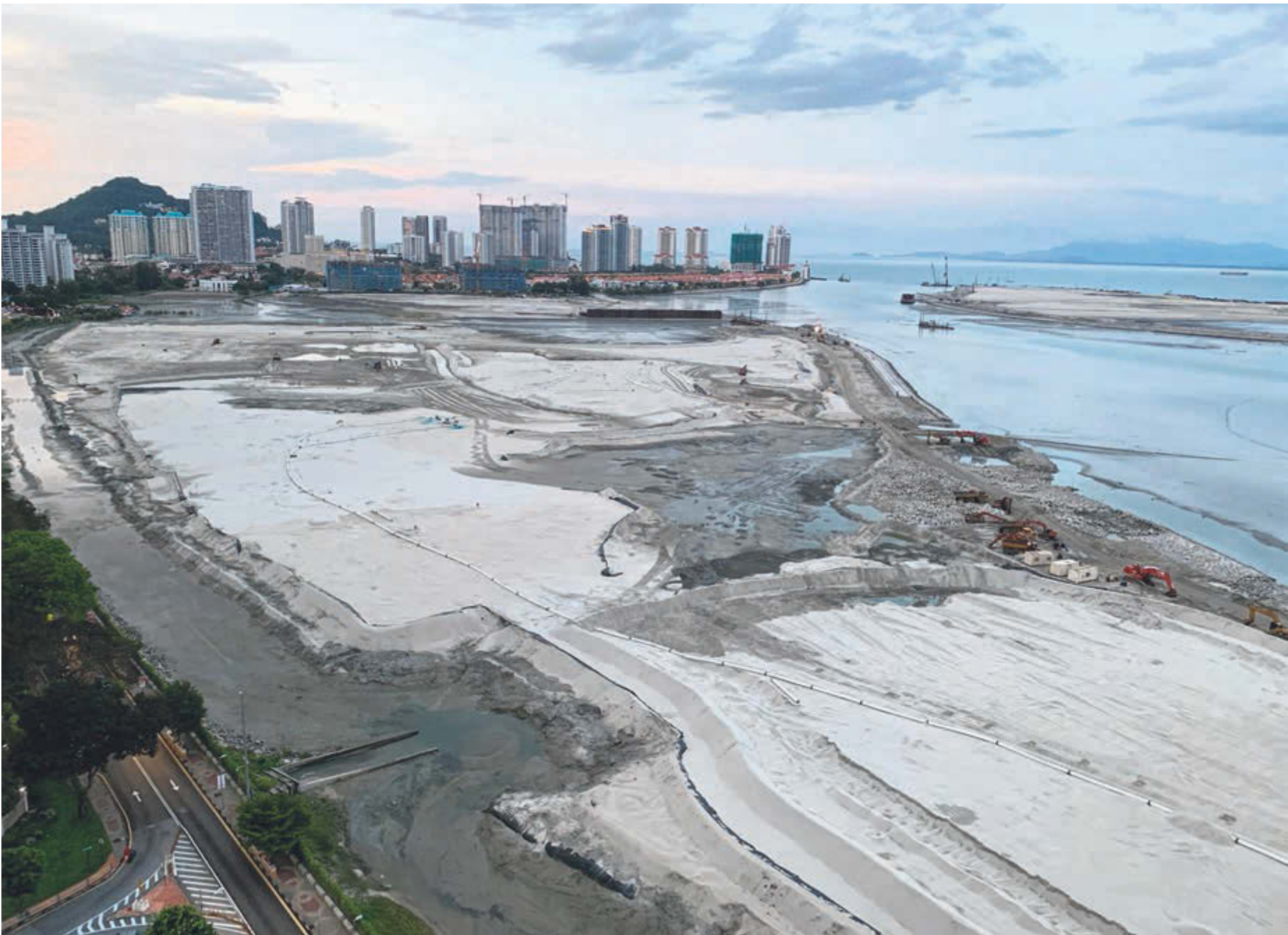
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Land reclamation at Penang's famous Gurney Drive beachfront (above). To finance the transport masterplan, the state government is proposing to reclaim land to build three islands for development on Penang's south coast totalling 1,738ha, nearly four times the size of Sentosa, sparking fears of damage to marine ecology. ST PHOTOS: SHANNON TEOH

Concerns over DAP's \$15b transport plan for Penang

State proposes Malaysia's most expensive infrastructure project

Shannon Teoh
Malaysia Bureau Chief
In George Town

A planned highway that will soar over green public parks and tunnel into mountains, an undersea road link, monorail and light rail transit (LRT) lines and a swathe of other roads make up Penang's ambitious RM46 billion (\$15.2 billion) plan to resolve its traffic woes.

This makes the Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP) Malaysia's most expensive infrastructure project. Yet it would serve just 1.8 million people living in Malaysia's second smallest state by land mass.

To finance the project, the state government headed by the Democratic Action Party (DAP) wants to reclaim land to build three islands for development on its south coast totalling 1,738ha, nearly four times the size of Sentosa.

"It has turned from a transport plan to a developer's plan," Penang Heritage Trust vice-president Khoo Salma Nasution, who was appointed a city councillor in January 2017, told The Straits Times. Real estate stands to boom should the various transport links be approved.

Just eight months ago, odds of the PTMP being implemented were seen as far-fetched, as the lofty ambitions of a state administration

wanting to spend 40 times its annual budget on a transport blueprint. The plan has evolved over a decade from what began as a RM10 billion idea.

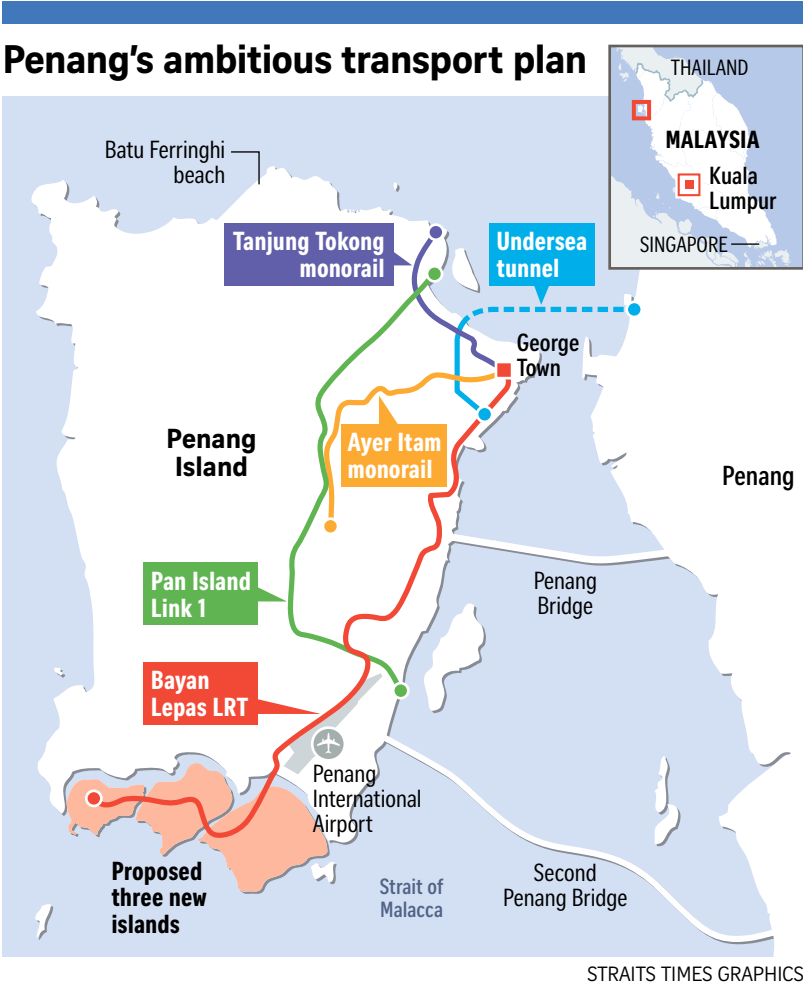
Prior to the landmark May 9 election last year, the project failed to make any progress, allegedly due to obstruction by the Barisan Nasional (BN) federal government which held power over financial, transport planning and environmental approvals.

But all these federal ministries are now helmed by DAP ministers, and the Pakatan Harapan (PH) alliance it leads in Penang holds all but three of the 40 wards in the state legislature. This has spooked civil society – led by the umbrella coalition Penang Forum – over whether the masterplan would be bulldozed through.

"Even though the opposition parties are lifeless now, NGOs have been shrill in their criticism of the state government's implementation of the PTMP," Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said at the Penang DAP congress last month. He later clarified that his administration is open to criticism and does not consider civil society its opponents.

Indeed, some Penangites, such as a group calling itself Anak Pinang (Children of Penang), are supportive of the masterplan as they struggle with traffic – average evening rush hour speeds in George Town are below 20kmh – during their daily commutes.

Still, there are concerns over specific parts of the project.



A sore point is the plan for a six-lane highway that cuts across the island's central mountain spine, called the Pan Island Link 1.

The highway will tower over Gurney Drive, a tourist destination popular with Singaporeans, weave in and out of hilly terrain including Penang Hill, even tunnel into a slope less than 500m from the Air Itam Dam on its 20km route across the island.

The highway project is cause for concern in Penang, with the island repeatedly making the news in the past year over fatal environmental incidents including flooding and landslides.

"The Bukit Kukus landslide is directly related to road infrastructure. This shows the fragile nature of hill land on Penang Island," said Penang Forum's geospatial and soil expert Kam Suan Pheng, referring to the tragedy last October which killed nine people.

Not only are some residents concerned about increased risk of landslides and flooding due to heavy construction – especially on hill slopes

such as the tunnel precariously close to the Air Itam Dam which stores over two million litres of water above a residential area – but they also worry about the financial burden on the state's coffers.

For example, the LRT ridership was projected to carry 42 million people annually on an island with just 800,000 people. Critics say this ridership target is impossible to achieve and fear the inevitable shortfall in ticket revenue.

Those opposed to the RM46 billion plan also cite the PH federal government's stalling on other mega projects such as the High-Speed Rail to Singapore and the East Coast Rail Line over funding problems as reasons to review it.

To others, using land reclamation to finance the PTMP has sparked fears of damage to marine ecology.

Fishermen living near the ongoing Seri Tanjung Pinang reclamation – a 405ha project that pushes the Gurney Drive coast out beyond the current bay – are complaining that they now have to supplement their incomes with second jobs.



LONG-TERM PLANNING

These projects are taking Penang through the next 50 years. What we are doing is laying the foundation for the future, while addressing today's concerns.

MR CHOW KON YEOW, Penang Chief Minister, on the long-term nature of the transport masterplan.



IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Where the fish and prawn are spawning, that's where they are building. We can't go further out to deeper waters with our small engines. If there is a storm, we will die.

MR ISHAK ABDUL RAHMAN, a 71-year-old local village leader and descendant of multi-generational fishermen, who has lost about 80 per cent of his catch.

"Where the fish and prawn are spawning, that's where they are building. We can't go further out to deeper waters with our small engines. If there is a storm, we will die," said 71-year-old Ishak Abdul Rahman, a local village leader and descendant of multi-generational fishermen, who has lost about 80 per cent of his catch.

Mr Chow points out the challenges of solving traffic woes on an island that is largely a "brown field" that forces infrastructure to be shunted expensively within built environments or away in the hills.

But the Chief Minister has said the deals for the masterplan have not been finalised, and proposals can be updated.

"These projects are taking Penang through the next 50 years. What we are doing is laying the foundation for the future, while addressing today's concerns," he told The Straits Times, when quizzed on the huge financial outlay.

But the island's activists, like former city councillor and banking expert Lim Mah Hui, who supported DAP in its bid to end BN's grip on the state government prior to 2008, are disappointed.

"They came into power and now accommodate us as a form of nuisance," the Penang Forum leader said. "It's been a change of guard rather than a change of government."

shannont@sph.com.sg

Vietnam's cyber-security law takes effect amid criticism

HANOI • A law requiring Internet companies in Vietnam to remove content that the communist authorities deem to be against the state came into effect yesterday, in a move critics called "a totalitarian model of information control".

The new cyber-security law has received sharp criticism from the United States, the European Union and Internet freedom advocates who say it mimics China's repressive censorship of the Internet.

The legislation requires Internet companies to remove content the

government regards as "toxic".

Tech giants such as Facebook and Google will also have to hand over user data if asked by the government, and open representative offices in Vietnam.

The communist country's powerful Ministry of Public Security (MPS) published a draft decree on how the law may be implemented in November, giving companies which offer Internet service in Vietnam up to 12 months to comply.

MPS has also said that the Bill was aimed at staving off cyber attacks –

weeding out "hostile and reactionary forces" using the Internet to stir up violence and dissent, according to a transcript of a question-and-answer session with lawmakers in October.

In response to the law, which was approved by Vietnam's rubber-stamp Parliament in June, Facebook said it was committed to protecting the rights of its users and enabling people to express themselves freely and safely.

"We will remove content that violates (Facebook's) standards when

we are made aware of it," Facebook said in a statement, adding that the social media giant has a clear process to manage requests from governments around the world.

Hanoi has said Google is taking steps to open up an office in Vietnam to comply with the new law.

The law also bans Internet users in Vietnam from spreading information deemed to be anti-state or anti-government, or use the Internet to distort history and "post false information that could cause damage to socio-economic activities".

Critics say online freedom in Vietnam is shrinking under a hardline administration that has been in charge since 2016.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called on the communist authorities to revise the law and postpone its implementation.

"This law is designed to further enable the Ministry of Public Security's pervasive surveillance to spot critics, and to deepen the Communist Party's monopoly on power," said Mr Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director of HRW.

The law comes into force a week after the Vietnam Journalists Association announced a new code of conduct on the use of social media by its members, forbidding reporters to post news, pictures and comments that "run counter to" the state.

Vietnam wants to build a reputation as a South-east Asian hub for financial technology.

Yet critics warn the new Internet law – particularly the data-sharing element – will make start-ups think twice about relocating to the country. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Women form human chain across Kerala in mass rally

Initiative in Indian state to back court order overturning ban on women entering temple

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM (Kerala) • Tens of thousands of women formed a human chain across the southern Indian state of Kerala yesterday in support of a court order overturning a partial ban on women entering one of Hinduism's holiest temples, witnesses said.

The "Women's Wall" rally was backed by the communist government in Kerala, where the court order on Sabarimala temple triggered weeks of protests by opponents and supporters of the ban, reported Agence France-Presse.

Media reports and supporters of the initiative claimed hundreds of thousands of women formed a human chain across the 620km-length of the state.

Government workers took part in the rally, while schools were given a half-day off and university exams delayed so that students could join the protest, the Press Trust of India news agency reported. A government statement issued before the event predicted five million women would participate in the protest.

Kerala has become the venue of an angry showdown between Hindu traditionalists and supporters of last September's Supreme Court ruling, which ended a ban on women aged between 10 and 50 entering the temple.

Several women have since tried to reach the hilltop shrine, but were forced back by opposing activists.

Police have clashed with devotees supporting the ban and have arrested more than 2,000 people.

Hundreds of thousands of Hindus – men and women – trek to the temple for an annual festival that usually falls around the end of the year.

Many Hindu groups and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) oppose the ruling. They argue that the court has ignored their beliefs that the deity Ayyappa celebrated at the temple was celibate.

Mr Modi yesterday tried to draw a distinction between his government's ordinance against a controversial Islamic divorce practice and the entry of women into Sabarimala. He told the ANI news agency that the government's opposition to the triple talaq divorce practice (which lets any Muslim man legally divorce his wife by stating the Arabic word talaq for divorce three times in oral or written form) was a matter of gender equality, whereas its support for the partial ban on women entering Sabarimala was related to tradition.

"The Triple Talaq Ordinance was

brought after a Supreme Court verdict. We have said in our BJP manifesto that a solution would be found to this issue under the Constitution," Mr Modi said.

"Most Islamic countries have banned triple talaq. So it is not a matter of religion or faith. Even in Pakistan, triple talaq is banned. So it is an issue of gender equality, a matter of social justice... not of faith. So keep the two separate."



Protesters and guards clashing in Hong Kong during yesterday's pro-democracy rally. Police said some 3,200 people attended the march at its peak, while organisers gave a higher figure of 5,500 people. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Thousands march in Hong Kong against 'repression' by China

HONG KONG • Thousands of demonstrators marched in Hong Kong yesterday to demand full democracy, fundamental rights, and even independence from

China, in the face of what many see as a marked clampdown by the Chinese Communist Party on local freedoms.

Over the past year, countries

such as the United States and Britain have expressed concerns over a number of incidents they say have undermined confidence in Hong Kong's freedoms and au-

tonomy under Chinese rule.

These include the jailing of activists, a ban on a pro-independence political party, the de facto expulsion of a Financial Times journalist as well as moves barring democracy activists from contesting local elections.

Police said some 3,200 people attended yesterday's march at its peak, while organisers gave a higher figure of 5,500 people, who called for the re-starting of stalled democratic reforms and to fight "political repression" from Beijing.

"Looking back at the year that passed, it was a very bad year... The rule of law in Hong Kong is falling backwards," said Mr Jimmy Sham, one of the organisers.

The former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula, with the promise of a high degree of autonomy from Beijing and universal suffrage.

While the authorities have clamped down hard on the city's fringe, pro-independence movement, that did not deter some 100 activists from joining the march, holding up banners and chanting for the city to separate from China.

Some protesters also carried "wanted" posters of Hong Kong's top legal official Theresa Cheng, criticising a decision to drop a corruption investigation into Hong Kong's former pro-Beijing leader Leung Chun-ying.

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE




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Greece Athens Two or more from \$219 Solo from \$239	Korea Seoul Two or more from \$229 Solo from \$239	Macau Two or more from \$109 Solo from \$119	Maldives Two or more from \$99 Solo from \$109
Hong Kong Two or more from \$89 Solo from \$99	United States of America Honolulu Two or more from \$319 Solo from \$339	Bangladesh Dhaka Two or more from \$119 Solo from \$129	China Nanjing, Qingdao, Ningbo, Hangzhou, Zhengzhou, Jinan, Quanzhou, Haikou, Harbin, Nanning, Shenzhen, Wuxi, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Shenyang, Tianjin Two or more from \$89 Solo from \$99
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A market in Raqqa, Syria. US military planners say they need about 120 days, or four months, to carry out an orderly withdrawal of 2,000 troops from Syria. Military officials have scrambled to translate President Donald Trump's shifting directives and comments into actual orders for commanders in Syria and Iraq to carry out. PHOTO: NYTIMES

Trump gives military more time to pull out from Syria

Troops have four months instead of 30 days; military officials say situation could change

WASHINGTON • President Donald Trump has agreed to give the US military about four months to withdraw its 2,000 troops in Syria, administration officials have said, backtracking from his abrupt order two weeks ago that the armed

forces pull out within 30 days.

Mr Trump confirmed on Twitter on Monday that American troops would "slowly" be withdrawn, but complained that he got little credit for the move after a fresh round of criticism from retired General

Stanley McChrystal and reports from the departing White House chief of staff, Mr John Kelly, about the President's impulsive decision-making.

"If anybody but Donald Trump did what I did in Syria, which was an ISIS-loaded mess when I became President, they would be a national hero," Mr Trump wrote.

"ISIS is mostly gone, we're slowly sending our troops back home to be

with their families, while at the same time fighting ISIS remnants."

For a president who has looked to the military for affirmation throughout his campaign and term, and boasted about stocking his Cabinet with what he called "my generals", Mr Trump's decision on Dec 19 to withdraw quickly from Syria was a significant split from his military and civilian advisers.

The criticism from Gen McChrystal, who commanded US-led troops in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010, echoed longstanding denunciations by former senior intelligence officials, who have warned that Mr Trump's approach to national security is reckless.

But during a surprise trip to Iraq last week, Mr Trump privately told the commander of US forces in Iraq and Syria, Lieutenant-General Paul LaCamera, that the military could have several months to complete a safe and orderly withdrawal, according to two US officials.

And on Sunday, Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, told reporters that a "pause situation" on the troop withdrawal was in effect.

By extending the timetable for withdrawal to several months, Mr Trump stuck to his commitment to untangle the United States from years-long military commitments, but also heeded warnings from cur-

rent and former military leaders of the danger of a quick exit.

Nevertheless, Mr Trump's latest plan left open the question of whether an orderly pullout from Syria would happen.

The military says it needs about 120 days to carry out a withdrawal that allows time to decide which equipment to move elsewhere in the region, leave behind with allies or disable to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Syrian government or Russia or Iran.

Military officials have declined to specify the timing of the departure, partly for operational security reasons and partly because many details are still quite fluid, and officials recognise that Mr Trump could change his mind at any time and speed up the departure.

When Mr Trump first ordered a drawdown within 30 days, his position provoked an outcry, including from some of his political allies like Mr Graham, who said a hasty withdrawal would leave exposed US partners such as the Kurds, who are concerned about a possible attack from Turkey.

But after lunch with Mr Trump at the White House on Sunday, Mr Graham said he felt "a lot better" about the President's plans.

Asked in a Fox News interview on Monday about how he had assuaged Mr Graham, the President replied: "I said, 'You know, I never said that I'm going to rush out'."

Mr Trump added that the fight against ISIS would continue, saying: "We have other bases in the general area."

Military officials have scrambled to translate Mr Trump's shifting directives and comments into actual orders for commanders in Syria and Iraq to carry out.

With most of his top advisers on vacation or having left the White House for good, Mr Trump spent the weekend talking to allies and watching cable news coverage of the partial government shutdown.

Mr Trump monitors the Sunday morning news shows, where Gen McChrystal warned that leaving Syria would effectively give up any US leverage over the war there.

"If you pull American influence out, you're likely to have greater instability and of course it'll be much more difficult for the United States to try to push events in any direction," Gen McChrystal said.

He was among the most vocal of retired military leaders who have increasingly criticised Mr Trump, who responded by tweeting on Monday about the "failed generals" who oversaw US engagements in the Middle East as they continued and were extended. NYTIMES

As Mattis exits, he tells US military to keep faith in country

HOLD FAST

Our department is proven to be at its best when the times are most difficult. So keep the faith in our country and hold fast, alongside our allies, aligned against our foes.



DEFENCE SECRETARY JAMES MATTIS, in his farewell message to US military forces.

WASHINGTON • Defence Secretary James Mattis has given his farewell message to the US armed forces, telling them to "keep the faith in our country" and stand firm alongside allies after he resigned over policy differences with President Donald Trump.

Mr Mattis, who had been seen as a stabilising factor in US defence policy, transferred authority near midnight on Monday to his deputy Patrick Shanahan, a former executive at Boeing.

A retired Marine general, Mr Mattis has often kept away from the spotlight. He did not have any sort of departure ceremony when he left the Pentagon, leaving his farewell memo as his final public remarks as defence secretary.

Historically, departing secretaries have had a major ceremony.

In his brief message, Mr Mattis acknowledged the political turbulence in Washington but called on the US military to stay firm in its

mission "to support and defend the Constitution while protecting our way of life".

"Our department is proven to be at its best when the times are most difficult. So keep the faith in our country and hold fast, alongside our allies, aligned against our foes," the outgoing defence chief said.

Last week, Mr Trump said he was replacing Mr Mattis two months earlier than had been expected, a move officials said was driven by Mr Trump's anger at Mr Mattis' resignation letter and its rebuke of the President's foreign policy.

Mr Mattis had resigned abruptly after falling out with Mr Trump, including over surprise decisions to withdraw all US troops from Syria and start planning a drawdown of forces in Afghanistan.

His resignation letter laid bare the growing divide between them, and implicitly criticised the President for failing to value America's closest allies, who fought alongside



President Donald Trump and Defence Secretary James Mattis at a meeting in June last year. The two had a testy relationship which culminated in Mr Mattis' resigning late last year. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

the United States in both conflicts.

Mr Shanahan, best known for his focus on internal Pentagon reform and his private sector experience, was due to take over as Acting Defence Secretary yesterday.

Mr Trump has suggested Mr Shanahan could stay in the role as acting secretary for a considerable amount of time.

Mr Shanahan has served as the deputy secretary of defence since July 2017. Before joining the Pentagon, he spent three decades at Boeing and was the general manager of the 787 Dreamliner passenger jet unit, among other positions.

The Acting Defence Secretary is not expected to break from major Pentagon policies, including a new

focus on the military threats from China and Russia, which were outlined in the US National Defence Strategy.

"Mr Shanahan was instrumental in crafting the National Defence Strategy. His ideas, priorities and philosophy are in that document," his spokesman, Army Lieutenant-Colonel Joe Buccino, said. REUTERS



Senator Elizabeth Warren's bread-and-butter issue is the defence of ordinary Americans against abuses by those with wealth and power. PHOTO: REUTERS

Democrat Warren enters 2020 race for White House

WASHINGTON • Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren – an outspoken critic of Wall Street and nemesis of President Donald Trump – has entered the 2020 race for the White House.

The 69-year-old progressive announced she was launching an exploratory committee for president on Monday, becoming the first major candidate in what is set to be an extraordinarily crowded Democratic primary, united by a singular focus on unseating Mr Trump.

The move will help Ms Warren

raise funds and hire more staff early in the campaign cycle – an effort in which she already leads most other potential Democratic candidates.

Her announcement came 13 months before the Iowa caucuses that launch what is expected to be a boisterous primary season.

"America's middle class is under attack," said a video message from Ms Warren, who has represented Massachusetts in the Senate since 2013, crafting a reputation as an economic populist.

"Corruption is poisoning our

democracy," she said. "Politicians look the other way while big insurance companies deny patients life-saving coverage, while big banks rip off consumers and while big oil companies destroy this planet."

That is why she is launching her exploratory committee, she said.

A former public-school teacher and Harvard law professor, Ms Warren has been a vocal advocate of consumer and workers' rights. But Americans may know her best for her sparring with Mr Trump – which has had mixed results.

Reacting to her latest move, Mr Trump said he was unsure whether Ms Warren could replace him at the White House. "You'd have to ask her psychiatrist," he quipped in an interview with Fox News.

"We'll see how she does. I wish her well, I hope she does well, I'd love to run against her."

As talk of a possible presidential run grew, Ms Warren has worked to

build her foreign policy credentials, taking a seat on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

She favours cuts in military spending and a troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. Her domestic policies are reliably liberal: She is pro-choice on abortion, supports gun control and has urged Democrats to go on "offence" to expand healthcare coverage for Americans.

But her bread-and-butter issue has been the defence of ordinary Americans against abuses by those with wealth and power.

With as many as three dozen Democrats weighing possible presidential bids, the road to the nomination will be arduous.

Polls for now show Ms Warren trailing veteran politicians like former vice-president Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders, both in their 70s – as well as rising young star Beto O'Rourke, who is 46.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Suicide watch on Facebook raises issues

Critics say social network's screening scheme could cause harm instead, and lead to arrests

NEW YORK • A police officer on the late shift in an Ohio town recently received an unusual call from Facebook. Earlier that day, a local woman had written a Facebook post saying she was walking home and intended to kill herself when she got there, according to a police report on the case.

Facebook called to warn the police department about the suicide threat. The officer who took the call quickly located the woman, but she denied having suicidal thoughts, the police report said.

Even so, the officer believed she might harm herself and told her that she must go to a hospital – either voluntarily or in police custody. He ultimately drove her to a hospital for a mental health work-up, an evaluation prompted by Facebook's intervention.

Police stations from Massachusetts to Mumbai have had similar alerts from Facebook over the past 18 months as part of what is likely the world's largest suicide threat screening and alert programme. The social network ramped up the effort after several people live-streamed their suicides on Facebook Live in 2017. It now utilises algorithms and user reports to flag possible suicide threats.

Facebook's rise as a global arbiter of mental distress puts it in a tricky position at a time when it is under investigation for privacy lapses by regulators in the United States, Canada and the European Union – as well as facing heightened scrutiny for failing to respond quickly to election interference and ethnic hatred campaigns on its site.

Even as Facebook's chief executive Mark Zuckerberg has apologised for improper harvesting of user data, the company has been grappling with fresh revelations about special data-sharing deals with tech companies.

The anti-suicide campaign gives Facebook an opportunity to frame its work as a good news story.

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 29 worldwide, according to the World Health Organisation. Some mental health experts and police officials said Facebook had aided officers in locating and stopping people who were clearly about to harm themselves.

Facebook has computer algorithms that scan the posts, comments and videos of users in the US and other countries for indications of immediate suicide risk. When a post is flagged, by the technology or a concerned user, it moves to human reviewers at the company, who then call law enforcement.

"In the last year, we've helped first responders quickly reach around 3,500 people globally who needed help," Mr Zuckerberg wrote in a November post about the company's efforts.

But other mental health experts said Facebook's calls to police could also cause harm – such as unintentionally precipitating suicide, compelling non-suicidal people to undergo psychiatric evaluations, or prompting arrests or shootings.

And, they said, it is unclear whether the company's approach is accurate, effective or safe.

Facebook said that, for privacy reasons, it did not track the outcomes of its calls to police. And it has not disclosed exactly how its reviewers decide whether to call emergency responders.

Critics said Facebook has assumed the authority of a public health agency while protecting its process as if it were a corporate secret. "It's hard to know what Facebook is actually picking up on, what they are actually acting on, and are they giving the appropriate response to the appropriate risk," said Dr John Torous, director of the digital psychiatry division at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre in Boston. "It's black box medicine."

Facebook said it worked with suicide prevention experts to develop a programme to quickly connect

users in distress with friends and send them contact information for help lines. It said experts also helped train dedicated Facebook teams, who have experience in law enforcement and crisis response, to review the most urgent cases.

In a forthcoming article in a Yale law journal, Mr Mason Marks, a health law scholar, argues that Facebook's suicide risk scoring software, along with its calls to police that may lead to mandatory psychiatric evaluations, constitutes the practice of medicine.

He said government agencies should regulate the programme, requiring Facebook to produce safety and effectiveness evidence. "In this climate in which trust in Facebook is really eroding, it concerns me that Facebook is just saying, 'Trust us here'," said Mr Marks, a fellow at Yale Law School and New York University School of Law.

A Facebook spokesman disagreed that the programme amounted to health screening, saying: "These are complex issues, which is why we have been working closely with experts." NYTIMES



QUICK RESPONSE

In the last year, we've helped first responders quickly reach around 3,500 people globally who needed help.



MR MARK ZUCKERBERG, Facebook's chief executive, in a post last November on the social network's suicide watch programme.

Telecommunications operator Courtney Davis and police officer Bruce Haire of Rock Hill, South Carolina. Facebook called Ms Davis about a man who was live-streaming a suicide attempt, helping Sergeant Haire find him. Some critics warn that Facebook is becoming an arbiter of users' mental distress without proving that its efforts are accurate, effective or safe. PHOTO: NYTIMES

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Nasa craft begins orbit of tiny asteroid in space feat

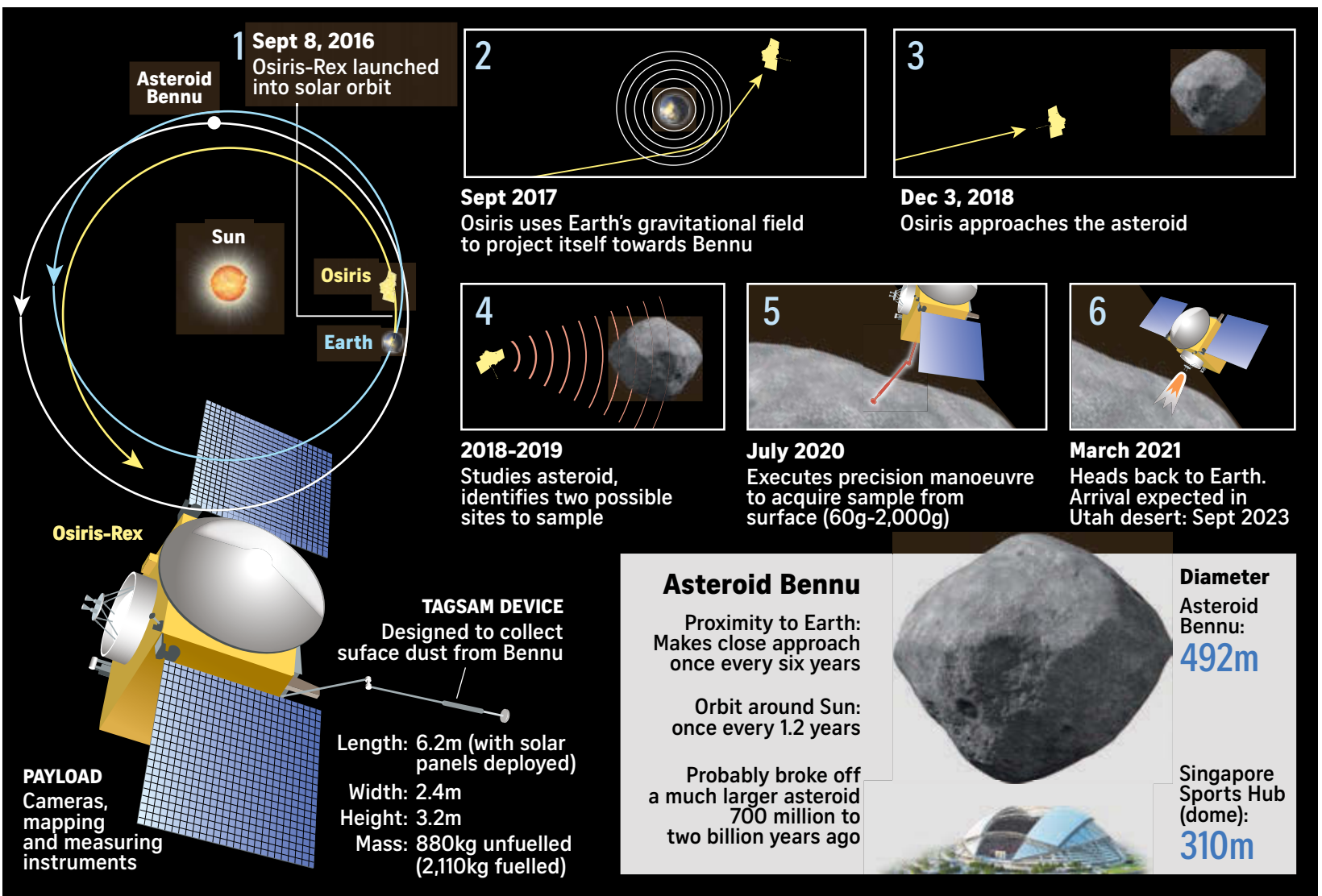
Osiris-Rex on milestone mission to bring back dust sample from carbon-rich asteroid

Nasa said the orbit marks “a leap for humankind” because no spacecraft has ever “circled so close to such a small space object – one with barely enough gravity to keep a vehicle in a stable orbit”.

TAMPA • A Nasa spacecraft has set a new milestone in cosmic exploration by entering orbit around an asteroid, Benu, the smallest object ever to be circled by a spaceship. The spacecraft, called Osiris-Rex, is the first-ever US mission designed to visit an asteroid and bring a sample of its dust back to Earth. The US\$800 million (S\$1.1 billion) unmanned spaceship launched two years ago from Cape Canaveral, Florida, and arrived on Dec 3 at its destination, some 110 million kilometres away. On Monday, after closely studying the asteroid for several weeks, the spaceship fired its thrusters to bring it into orbit around Benu. The asteroid measures about 500m in diameter. “Entering orbit around Benu is an amazing accomplishment that our team has been planning for years,” said Dr Dante Lauretta, Osiris-Rex principal investigator at the University of Arizona, Tucson. Nasa said the orbit marks “a leap for humankind” because no spacecraft has ever “circled so close to

Osiris-Rex mission to asteroid Benu

The robotic spacecraft will collect samples from ancient Benu that may shed light on the origins of life



Source: AFP STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

such a small space object – one with barely enough gravity to keep a vehicle in a stable orbit”. The spacecraft is orbiting Benu a little more than a kilometre from its centre. The European Space Agency’s Rosetta spacecraft orbited a comet in May 2016, but at a further distance of about 6.4km from the centre of the comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko. Benu has a gravity force only five-millionths as strong as Earth’s,

Nasa said. Each orbit by Osiris-Rex will take 62 hours. The plan is for Osiris-Rex to orbit Benu through mid-February, using a suite of five scientific instruments to map the asteroid in high resolution to help scientists decide precisely where to sample from. Then, in 2020, it will reach out with its robotic arm and touch the asteroid in a manoeuvre that Mr Rich Kuhns, Osiris-Rex programme manager with Lockheed Martin

Space Systems in Denver, described as a “gentle high-five”. Using a circular device much like a car’s air filter, and a reverse vacuum to stir up and collect dust, the device aims to grab about 60g of material from the asteroid’s surface, and return it to Earth in 2023. A fragment of the early solar system, Benu is also considered potentially dangerous. It poses a slight risk – a one in 2,700 chance – of colliding with Earth in 2135.

The carbon-rich asteroid was chosen from some 500,000 asteroids in the solar system because it orbits close to Earth’s path around the Sun, is the right size for scientific study, and is one of the oldest asteroids known to Nasa. Scientists hope it will reveal more about the early formation of the solar system, as well as how to find precious resources like metals and water in asteroids. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Brazil starts new chapter under far-right Bolsonaro

BRASILIA • Brazil entered a new chapter in the country’s history yesterday, embracing a far-right President, Mr Jair Bolsonaro, whose determination to break with decades of centrist rule has raised both hopes and fears. The former paratrooper and long-time lawmaker was starting his four-year mandate yesterday, as required by the Constitution, after a night of New Year’s celebrations across the country. He takes office with a sky-high approval rating, fuelled by public expectations that he will be a new broom sweeping away chronic crime and corruption, and boosting an economy still limping after a record recession. “I will bring in politics completely different from that which brought corruption and inefficiency to Brazil,” he said late on Monday in an interview with Record TV. The 63-year-old comfortably

won an October election against Mr Fernando Haddad, a candidate from the left-wing Workers’ Party that was in power between 2003 and 2016, but is now reviled after a series of graft scandals. The Workers’ Party icon, former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, is serving prison time for corruption. And his chosen successor Dilma Rousseff was impeached for cooking the government’s books. In a ceremony marked by pomp and high security, Mr Bolsonaro was set to formally take over from centre-right Michel Temer, who succeeded Ms Rousseff but made little headway with needed fiscal reforms and ended up Brazil’s most unpopular leader ever. Mr Bolsonaro’s supporters hope he will do better. He has promised to govern for all 210 million Brazilians, and had campaigned on vows to eradicate graft, crack down on

crime, open up Brazil’s protectionist economy to the free market, and put business interests ahead of environmental protection. In his interview, he said “we will debureaucratise to the maximum possible” and “clean out” the government so its “weight” is cut back. But there has been no sign of him dropping the bluff style that has earned him comparisons with US President Donald Trump, whom he admires. Even before taking office, Mr Bolsonaro tweeted that he will issue a decree easing gun laws so “good” citizens can possess weapons to deter criminals. That worries many, who fear it could aggravate Brazil’s rampant violence. Mr Bolsonaro’s track record of waxing nostalgic for Brazil’s 1964-1985 military dictatorship has also stirred some concerns, as have his past disparaging remarks about



T-shirts with the image of new Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on display for sale in Brasilia. Inaugurated yesterday, Mr Bolsonaro has vowed to eradicate graft, crack down on crime and open up Brazil’s protectionist economy to the free market. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

women, gays and blacks. A more forceful foreign policy is on its way, with the new leader saying he will do all he can to challenge leftist-ruled Venezuela and Cuba.

Mr Bolsonaro has also said he will pull his country out of a United Nations global pact on migration, and he is considering whether to keep Brazil in the Paris climate accord.

But the new leader’s supporters, more than 250,000 of whom were expected in Brasilia yesterday, expressed full-throated backing for Mr Bolsonaro. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Emergency officers rescuing a baby who was found alive yesterday after being trapped under the rubble of a Russian apartment block for 35 hours. The block partially collapsed in an explosion. The 11-month-old has been diagnosed with serious freezer burn and a closed-head injury. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Baby rescued after 35 hours spent in rubble of building

MOSCOW • A baby boy has been found alive after 35 hours spent in freezing cold in the rubble of a Russian apartment block that partially collapsed in an explosion, emergency officials reported yesterday, calling it a miracle. The blast, thought to have been caused by a gas leak, damaged 48 apartments in a 10-storey building in the industrial city of Magnitogorsk on Monday, killing at least seven people, with 36 people still missing. Video footage from the local emergency ministry showed a rescue worker removing the baby, who was wearing pink socks, and putting a blanket around the infant before running towards an ambulance. The current temperature in Magnitogorsk is minus 17 deg C. The fact that the 11-month-old baby, diagnosed with serious freezer burn and a closed-head injury, was lying in his bed and wrapped up in layers saved his life, Tass news agency reported, citing a

regional emergency centre. The baby was found when a rescuer heard him crying and “a large-scale operation was immediately organised”, Interfax news agency reported, citing emergency officials. It was difficult to retrieve the baby because of unstable debris, which posed risks for rescuers. “Hundreds of people were waiting for the appearance of the injured child from under the rubble like a miracle. And the miracle happened,” the officials were quoted as saying by Interfax. “Tears fell from the eyes of the weather-beaten rescuers.” The boy’s mother is alive and has already arrived at the hospital, Interfax added. Rescuers had earlier been forced to halt the search for missing people in the rubble as the building risked crumbling further, officials said yesterday. Regional Governor Boris Dubrovsky has announced a day of mourning for today. REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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Improving access, diversity in schools

The move to increase diversity at top schools, by making them affordable for all, marks the latest step taken on Singapore's journey towards an educational meritocracy which is less differentiated by the economic starting point of children. It has been announced that independent school fees will be cut by more than half, in some cases, for children from low- and middle-income families. This is an incremental move in the sense that many independent schools already have financial assistance schemes of their own. However, the announcement reaffirms the national remit of the determination to ensure that parents are not deterred from expecting the best for their children because of their pecuniary circumstances.

Thus, under the enhanced Independent School Bursary scheme, students from low- or middle-income families will, from April, generally pay lower fees than they are charged now at independent schools. Children from families in the lowest income tier can also qualify for a new \$800 annual Uplift scholarship for out-of-pocket expenses. These are meaningful gestures in putting to rest the cost concerns that many parents have about education in elite schools. That should free them to focus on the really important questions of what is best for their children, how they can contribute to the meritocratic aspects of the educational institutions, and how schools can work with students to broaden national horizons.

For the latest initiative to succeed, merely getting a more diverse range of children into top schools will not be sufficient. They must also feel accepted there by their peers. There is a human tendency to look differently at those who receive the same services at a much lower cost because of their circumstances; they could be viewed harshly as being almost free-riders who are subsidised by the State. That would be a myopic attitude to take. If meritocracy demands both that nobody should be rewarded beyond what he has achieved through competitive effort, it is equally the case that nobody should settle for less than what he deserves. It is worth remembering that 7.5 per cent of pupils living in one- to three-room

HDB flats are placed in the top 20 per cent in the Primary School Leaving Examination. It would be a let-down for meritocracy, which is based on the egalitarian recognition of talent and not inherited advantages of class, to deprive academically motivated children of the opportunity to attend top schools. Their peers, and others, should acknowledge this basic fact of excellence. Even the best of schemes will fail if those who are eligible for them also pass them up. Parents and educators must encourage children who are performing well to understand and prepare for the rigours of studying in elite schools. These institutions of learning will, in turn, benefit from having a wider social base to sustain their quest for excellence.

Economic Affairs

The euro's unhappy birthday

The euro is akin to a house being built from the roof downwards, with its foundation still under construction



Vikram Khanna

Associate Editor

On New Year's Day yesterday, the single European currency, the euro, turned 20.

A week of celebrations are planned across the euro zone. But, looking back, there would seem to be little to celebrate, besides the chronological milestone. Large parts of the 19-nation euro zone are plagued with chronic problems.

The group's gross domestic product (GDP) took eight painful years to recover to levels prevailing before the global financial crisis of 2008. Growth has returned but is still anaemic, projected at less than 2 per cent this year.

Unemployment is around 8 per cent (more than twice that of the United States) – a 10-year low, but remains in double digits in Italy, Spain and Greece, where youth unemployment ranges between 30 and 40 per cent.

Italy's GDP per capita is stuck at the same level as when the euro was introduced. Greece has endured negative growth for eight of the past 10 years, and about a quarter of its economy has been wiped out. Anti-EU political forces have been gaining strength across the euro zone, even in its largest members Germany, France and Italy.

While the euro cannot be blamed for all of these problems, there is plenty of evidence that it has made them worse and more difficult to resolve.

The architects of the euro, including former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the former president of the European Commission Jacques Delors and several eminent intellectuals saw it as an instrument of peace and fraternity in the euro zone, which would increase cross-border trade and challenge the dominance of the US dollar in global currency markets.

The French also wanted the euro to dilute the power of Germany

and, particularly, its central bank. But the outcomes have been closer to the opposite of what was intended or expected.

This was not unforeseen. As long ago as 1971, soon after the idea of the euro was first mooted, the eminent British-Hungarian economist Nicholas Kaldor warned that a single currency for Europe would not narrow but widen economic divergences among countries and create political divisions.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, who disagreed with Mr Kaldor on almost everything else, agreed with him on the euro's potential as a divisive force. Similar sentiments were voiced later by Dr Ralf Dahrendorf, the British-German sociologist, and even by Dr Hans Tietmeyer, the president of the Bundesbank just before the euro was introduced, who warned of the threat of disintegration of the euro zone in the absence of a political union.

But these dissenting voices were ignored in the rush to push through what was essentially a political, rather than economic, project. It was assumed that once a monetary union was in place with the euro, the momentum would build for a fiscal and political union – that all would be well in the end.

But that is not how things turned out.

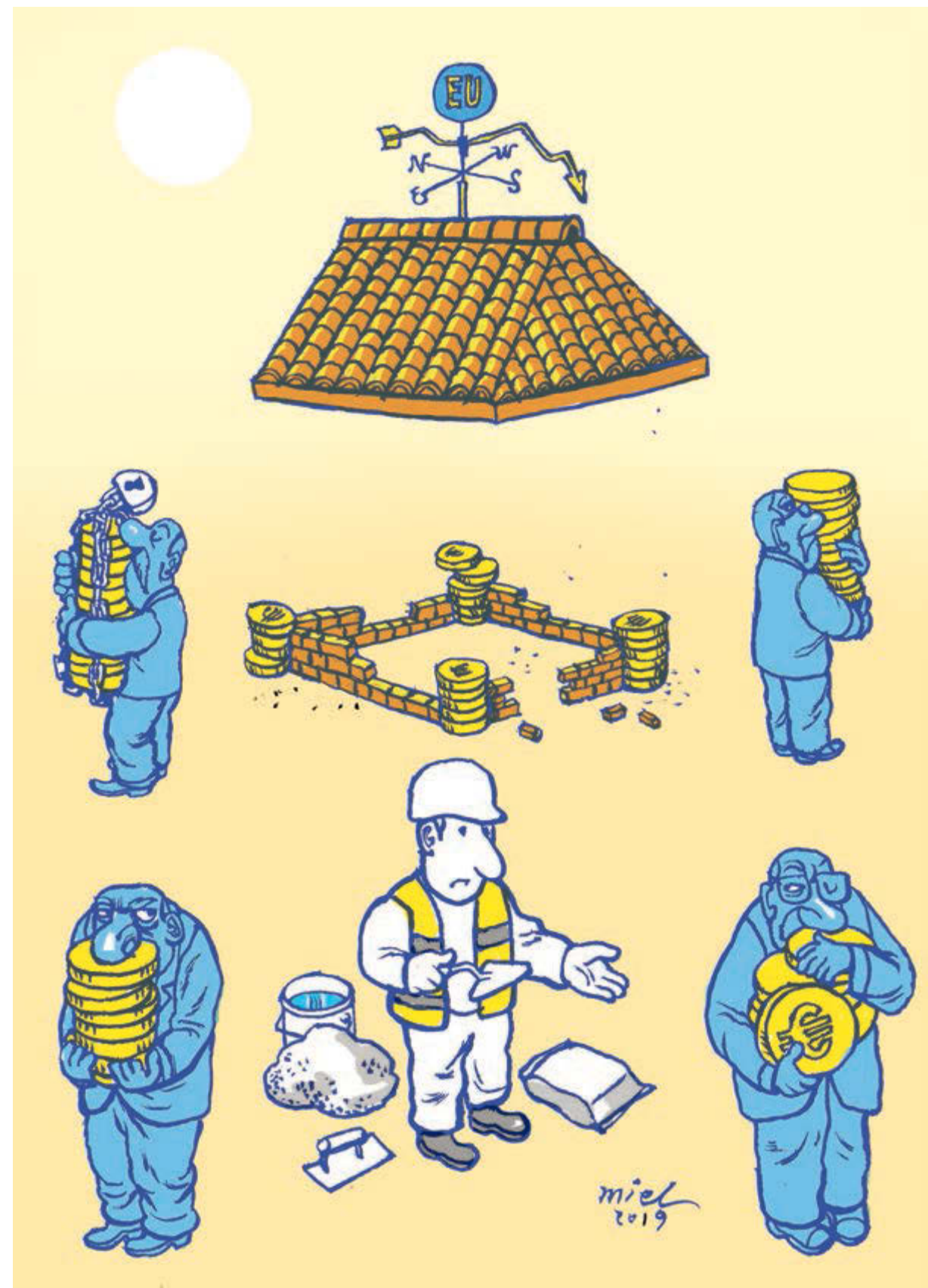
A SMOOTH START, AND THEN DIVERGENCE

The early years of the euro were largely trouble-free, at least on the surface. But there were already big differences among economies.

From 1999 to 2005, Germany suffered from low growth and was branded "the sick man of Europe". But the economies of southern Europe – Spain, Italy and Greece – as well as Ireland, were growing fast.

Germany practised wage restraint, enjoyed near-zero inflation and improved its competitiveness compared with the faster-growing economies, where wages and inflation were rising. In such a situation, a one-size-fits-all monetary policy was unsuitable.

The low interest rate for the euro (around 3 per cent) set by the new European Central Bank (ECB) suited slow-growing, low-inflation Germany, but it was not



appropriate for the faster-growing countries, some of whom had interest rates which were negative after adjusting for inflation. So people in these countries had strong incentives to borrow.

Two things happened because of this. First, capital flowed from Germany to southern Europe and Ireland. Much of the money ended up fuelling property booms. In Italy and Greece, the governments lived beyond their means and found their fiscal deficits growing.

The differences in growth and inflation rates between Germany and southern Europe also began to be reflected in the balance of payments. German products such as capital goods, cars and chemicals flooded the markets of the south. So Germany started accumulating trade surpluses while the south ran rising deficits. Nobody – neither the ECB, nor the credit rating agencies, nor the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – paid much attention to these increasing divergences, until the global financial crisis of 2008.

FLAWS EXPOSED BY CRISIS

That was when all hell broke loose. The property bubbles in Spain and

Ireland burst, putting banks which held the mortgages in serious trouble. Those banks had to be bailed out by their governments at vast expense, leading to huge increases in public debt. Countries running current-account deficits, such as Italy, Portugal and especially Greece, found it suddenly expensive to borrow. A lot of banks holding their assets, such as sovereign bonds, were staring at enormous potential losses, as these countries could no longer afford to service their debts. By 2011, the euro zone had a full-blown debt crisis on its hands.

This could have been avoided if countries had their own currencies and monetary policies rather than being hamstrung by the straitjacket created by the euro. They could have raised interest rates to prevent property bubbles building up. They could have devalued their currencies to regain the competitiveness that they were losing to Germany. They could have issued bonds in their own currencies rather than in the euro, over which they had no control. The debt crisis could have been avoided or, at least, less painfully resolved.

Moreover, the individual problems of Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Italy would have remained national problems. They would not have become Europe-wide systemic dangers that threatened even the global economy.

PAINFUL AND DIVISIVE

The way the EU dealt with the crisis turned out to be extremely painful and divisive. With the option of currency devaluation unavailable, the creditor countries together with the IMF demanded that the debtors impose draconian "internal devaluations" – cuts in wages, pensions and public spending as well as tax increases – to pay off their debts. Their argument: these countries had irresponsibly lived beyond their means, and should pay the price.

The debtors pushed back, accusing the creditors of being rapacious colonisers who were equally responsible for the crisis.

In the event, the creditors had their way. The debtor countries were put through wrenching recessions – a depression in the case of Greece from which they have still not fully recovered.

At one point in 2012, the threat of a systemic crisis became serious. Despite the austerity – or, more accurately, because of it – debtor countries were unable to get their debts under control and some were on the verge of default. The euro itself came under threat. In July 2012, ECB president Mario Draghi uttered his most memorable eight words, vowing that he would "do whatever it takes to preserve the euro". Soon after, the ECB announced a programme to buy the bonds of distressed debtors, known as Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT). That provided markets the reassurance that the ECB was willing to act as a lender of last resort. The panic subsided and, over the next five years, the debtors were able to slowly clear their way out of the crisis.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

But it isn't over yet. Italy's debts have climbed to more than 130 per cent of GDP and its populist, eurosceptic government is refusing to impose the austerity that creditors want to see. The third largest member of the euro zone, Italy is too big to fail but also too big to save. How the Italian drama plays out will be one of the big stories of 2019.

Many of the euro's design flaws have yet to be fixed. There is still no automatic mechanism to transfer funds from one part of the euro zone to another during a crisis. As the biggest and richest economy with the most savings, Germany resists such an idea. From the beginning, Germany has made clear that it would not pay the bills of other countries; as the response to the debt crisis showed, there would be no fiscal risk-sharing. Thus the idea of a central euro zone budget hasn't happened.

When the idea was raised for discussion in a December 2012 summit of European leaders, German Chancellor Angela Merkel asked the simple question: "Where is the money supposed to come from?" (Much of it would be from Germany, of course.) Euro zone-wide deposit insurance has been elusive for the same reason: German savers would have to foot most of the bill.

Even the lender of last resort function is not properly in place. The OMT is not unconditional and automatic as is normal; to be eligible, troubled debtors must submit to a reform programme. But in early December 2018, the EU set out a road map for "deepening Europe's economic and monetary union", through proposals to create a European Monetary Fund to help countries in financial distress and appoint a European Minister of Economy and Finance for the first time.

A charitable appraisal of the euro at the end of 20 years is that it is a work in progress. It is like a house that is being built from the roof downwards, with the foundations still under construction.

Unleashed upon Europe in a semi-finished state, it has exacted a heavy toll on many of its members. Thus, on its 20th birthday, not everybody is celebrating.

As Mr Draghi put it in a recent speech, the anniversary is, more appropriately, a time for "candid and close introspection that could inspire future action on how to complete the monetary union".

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Global Compact on Refugees is a good start, yet much remains to be done

Syed Munir Khasru

For The Straits Times

On Christmas Day, a second Guatemalan child died in United States government custody while being detained after crossing the US-Mexico border.

In Libya, rampant child abuse persists in 26 Britain-funded refugee detention centres which critics say have been created as a way for European countries to outsource their problem with asylum seekers in their borders.

More than 200 children are held in Australia's offshore detention centre in Nauru, where they live in prison-like holding areas, with many separated from families.

These incidents demonstrate that the global refugee management architecture needs fixing.

Amid such stark realities, out of a total 193 United Nations members, 181 endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees half a month ago, after two years of intense negotiations, dialogues and consultations.

The Global Compact on Refugees was envisioned after the historic New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants at the United Nations Summit on Sept 19, 2016. Through this declaration, the UN member states declared their political will towards improving global refugee and migration governance.

The declaration was historic as, for the first time on a global platform, both open and inward-looking states declared their willingness to address problems with the current global refugee and migration regime. As part of that declaration in 2016, UN member states agreed to work on two global compacts: on migration and refugees. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was formally adopted in Marrakech last Dec 10.

A week later, the Global Compact on Refugees was adopted.

However, the US and Hungary refused to endorse it and Eritrea, Liberia and Libya abstained. Hungary had declared beforehand that it would reject it and Mr Peter Szijarto, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, was quoted saying: "With the Global Compact on Refugees, the UN prepared the little brother of the Global Compact on Migration, which opens the back door to those that cannot come in through the main entrance."

Both the migration and refugee compacts aim to provide concrete guidelines and milestones to improve the situation of refugees and migrants.

Refugees are individuals with no

choice but to escape their country to flee persecution and threat to life while a migrant is a person leaving his country of origin to either escape a bad situation or to look for better livelihood in other countries.

Endorsement of the compact on refugees by 181 states amid an environment of growing populism is a welcome change. The non-binding but pragmatic and detailed nature of the compact and its global refugee framework will not force but encourage states to adhere to it. It requires pledges that states will not shirk from humanitarian commitments made on international platforms and risk harming their international goodwill and reputation.

While there is some scepticism on whether a non-binding compact can be effective, encouragement can be sought from the UN Millennium Development Agenda (popularly known as MDGs, from the eight Millennium Development Goals). Although a global non-binding, informal pact, it is viewed as a success because of the nature of its goals and reachable targets.

The same could hold true for the refugee compact. It calls for shared responsibility which should be welcomed by many developing and developed states which have been stretched to their limits in hosting refugees while many resource-rich nations have paid only lip-service to their responsibilities as 1951 Refugee Convention signatories.

Unlike the compact, the 1951 Refugee Convention is a legally binding, multilateral UN treaty which obliges signatories (145 in total) to protect refugees who are in their territory. While both Germany and Japan are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Germany has hosted one million Syrians while Japan has given shelter to only a handful.

Financing the cost of protecting refugees, finding sustainable rehabilitation for them in both host and origin country should not be just the responsibility of a handful of countries but all signatories of the convention and the compact.

The compact is well-crafted and sets out concrete measures to arrange for better burden-sharing responsibility through a Global Refugee Forum to be held every four years. The forum will also conduct follow-ups and reviews and develop indicators to measure success in achieving the compact's objectives. These objectives include easing pressure on host countries; enhancing refugee self-reliance; expanding access to third-country solutions; and supporting conditions in countries of origin for refugees to return to in safety and with dignity.



Given how the refugee crises have unfolded over the past decade, it is impossible for states to shirk their responsibilities for an issue that has reached global proportions. At the end of 2017, there were nearly 25.4 million refugees around the world. Today, just 10 countries host 60 per cent of the world's refugees. Turkey alone hosts 3.5 million refugees, more than any other country. In Lebanon, one in every six people is a refugee and in Jordan, it is one in 14. More than a million Rohingya refugees now seek shelter in Bangladesh's coastal district of Cox's Bazar.

Ten governmental donors provide almost 80 per cent of UNHCR's funding. There is a problem with equal burden-sharing and the compact for refugees attests that and seeks to address it.

Many states like the US and Australia are already signatories to the Refugee Convention, which subjects them to take in refugees in need of protection against political, social and physical threat. The compact does not place anything additional to these obligations and, in fact, provides an implementable and practical path for the global community to undertake burden-sharing with regard to both hosting and financing.

Similarly, the compact does not open a floodgate of refugees into the heartland of Europe, but provides detailed pathways and

milestones that can be reached and actions that can be undertaken to improve the ways refugees are treated in countries where they seek asylum. The compact also provides implementable guidelines for repatriating refugees to their countries of origin.

Migration, whether forced or voluntary, has always been a part of human history, and is especially commonplace in today's globalised and hyper digital world. Pre-modern migration of the Homo erectus from Africa to Eurasia to other parts of the world were the first instances of migration. People will always try to seek places to maximise their opportunities and settle in places where they find better ways of life and can live without fear.

Without a global road map for forced and voluntary migration management, refugees will continue to suffer and illegal migration will continue to thrive at the cost of lives and human dignity.

A girl from El Salvador looking through the US-Mexico border fence in Playas de Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico, hoping, like other Central American migrants, to get into the United States. At the end of 2017, there were nearly 25.4 million refugees around the world. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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• Syed Munir Khasru is chairman of The Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance, an international think-tank with presence in Melbourne, Vienna, Dhaka and UAE. He led the team that prepared two policy briefs on Migration for the G-20 Leader's Summits in Hamburg, Germany from July 7-8, 2017, and in Buenos Aires, Argentina from Nov 30-Dec 1 last year.

US and China should aim for a digital peace agreement

Klaus Schwab

The United States and China last November agreed on a three-month truce in their ongoing trade war. That was good news for all who aim for growth through trade. As the end of the truce nears, the best next step is for them to agree on a more structural update to the rules-based international order. If they succeed, both can thrive in the digital age.

For 250 years, trade and globalisation were mostly about shipping physical goods – and so was economic dominance. Sailing ships carrying spices across empires prefigured the manufacturing value chains we know today. But globalisation's future will be in the realms of knowledge, information and technology.

A 2016 McKinsey study found e-commerce already accounts for 12 per cent of international trade, and predicted a fivefold increase in data flows by 2022. Meanwhile, millions of services are delivered digitally, and these, too, increasingly take place across borders. More but different forms of globalisation are on their way, and will require an update to the global framework governing trade.

No country can close itself off from trends, and the digital world presents new dangers. Even war has a cyber dimension now. States, organisations and individuals can wreak havoc in previously unimaginable ways. To keep massive quantities of data moving as seamlessly as shipping containers requires internationally accepted rules.

So, what should the US and China discuss next time they meet?

Today's trade dispute, though being fought over goods, could form the basis of a new international settlement in the digital areas of globalisation. It could focus on rules surrounding technology trade and cooperation rather than traditional trade.

The world's leading economies could collaborate on an international framework that puts digital, cyber, artificial intelligence and intellectual property innovations at its core. It should aim to create a global environment that is safe, allows rule-abiding countries to pursue their interests and ensures we can prosper for generations to come.

Establishing such a framework could lead to another era of unprecedented growth and peace, but it has to be done right. When things go wrong in a highly connected world, the threats originate in unexpected places and move in unexpected directions. Hacking elections, incitement to violence in online hate groups and cyber attacks by foreign agents have all caused much harm already. There is surely more mischief to come.

Whatever happens, the institutions governing the digital era won't be led by a single guarantor, like the US in its current role. Other emerging and established powers will claim places at the table, as will non-state actors such as businesses, tech leaders and non-governmental organisations. Every contributor will also share in maintaining accountability.

Still, the US is the country that has pulled the alarm bell. This gives it an advantage over rising powers in shaping what comes next.

The old order that it founded and maintained appears to be crumbling, but if America leverages its first-mover advantage in negotiations, then it could come out of the current dispute with a rules-based order for fair competition in a global economy where bits matter more than bricks. WASHINGTON POST

• Klaus Schwab is founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum.

No country can close itself off from trends, and the digital world presents new dangers. Even war has a cyber dimension now. States, organisations and individuals can wreak havoc in previously unimaginable ways. To keep massive quantities of data moving as seamlessly as shipping containers requires internationally accepted rules.

Seeking inner peace in a violent, unequal world is not a selfish act

Holly Rigby

Late last year, Twitter chief executive officer Jack Dorsey felt the wrath of his own social media platform when he posted a series of fulsome tweets about his experience of a 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat in Myanmar, a country that has recently been plagued by brutal ethnic violence.

After Mr Dorsey admiringly celebrated Myanmar as an "absolutely beautiful country" where "people are full of joy", numerous critics were quick to point out that Mr Dorsey failed to even mention the military-led campaign of mass killings, rape and torture of the Muslim Rohingya population. It was, to say the very least, insensitive.

I was not aware of this story when it first broke, however, because I was on a 10-day silent Vipassana

meditation retreat of my own at the time (albeit in the less controversial setting of rural Herefordshire).

During the retreat, meditators are not allowed to use the Internet or electronic devices, and cannot read books or newspapers, write, exercise, talk or even make eye contact.

When I emerged from my retreat, reading about the Dorsey controversy forced me to confront a question many of us must wrestle with: What does it mean to find personal inner peace and harmony in an inhumane, capitalist world plagued by gross inequalities of wealth and power?

This is not a question with any easy answers. But it is perhaps worth explaining why I personally decided to attempt to master the particularly disciplined and austere style of Vipassana meditation.

In common with one in four people in the United Kingdom today, I have struggled to manage

my mental health for most of my adult life. I've tried every type of therapy going, and spend a large part of my less-than-princely teaching salary on yoga, mindfulness classes and massages whenever I can afford to do so.

Vipassana's core teachings therefore seemed attractive; my retreat emphasised that human experience will always be a series of pleasurable and painful episodes, and that learning to respond to these with equanimity can develop one's sense of inner peace and harmony.

Vipassana is based on ancient Buddhist teachings and philosophy, but the technique can be practised by those with any religion or none. The idea is that you learn to accept the reality of the present moment, however painful, without trying to change it. The teachings argue that this desire to change is the cause of your suffering.

A variation on this teaching is

now being disseminated in mindfulness training programmes in workplaces across the West, from corporations to the multi-academy trust chain I used to work for.

But this is where the potential problems begin to emerge in the translation from East to West. By encouraging employees to "accept the reality of the present moment", there is a danger that toxic work environments and unmanageable workloads will be allowed to persist, and any failure to manage them will be judged to lie with the individual, not the institution.

As a secondary school teacher, I don't need a mindfulness course to help me "manage" my workload – I just need less work. Not only that, but Vipassana courses emphasise that all human beings suffer, whether they are tech billionaires or children living in abject poverty in austerity-addled Britain today.

Oliver James' Affluenza may have argued that excessive wealth

makes the rich miserable too, but Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's new book, The Inner Level, shows that the suffering generated by poor mental health is significantly exacerbated by issues of class, gender, disability and race. That should never be forgotten.

This is why Mr Dorsey's tweets were so distasteful; he neither acknowledged the suffering of the Rohingya, nor made any suggestion that action must be taken to address this grotesque injustice.

But it could be argued that Mr Dorsey is not properly following the Vipassana teachings; at least not the ones I was exposed to. Buddhist philosophy emphasises that seeking inner peace through meditation should allow practitioners to more deeply understand the suffering of others, and strengthen one's resolve to take strong action to intervene where injustice has occurred.

We live in a complicated,

troubled world. As a trade unionist and Labour Party activist, I believe that taking part in the struggle to transform society for the better is the fundamental collective task that faces us today.

Self-care can never be a substitute for political struggle. Helping to create a more equal society is the best way to address the suffering that results from chronically poor mental health.

But my experience of Vipassana was that such practices can fortify us for the many challenges that lie ahead. As ever more political and economic chaos unfurls around us, developing fragments of inner peace can strengthen our capacity to effect change out there in the world.

Mr Dorsey deserved the criticism he got. But it won't stop me meditating. THE GUARDIAN

• Holly Rigby teaches at an Inner London academy school and is a Labour Party member and activist.



Yellow Vest protesters taking part in an anti-government demonstration in Bordeaux last Saturday. The movement has morphed into a protest against the French President's policies and top-down style of governing. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Europe's left nearly died in 2018. Here's how it can rise

Once dominant, the socialist left needs to reinvent itself by finding clarity on three issues: Whom it stands for, what it stands for and how to communicate the ideas.

Leonid Bershidsky

The collapse of Europe's once-dominant socialist political parties has been apparent for years, and it continued last year. By now, however, the left has the information it needs to pull out of its nosedive. It just has to start using it.

The crushing defeats of 2017 – the near-death experience of the Socialist Party in France, the deflation of the Social Democrats in Germany and the Labour Party in the Netherlands, the shrinking of the entire left wing in the Czech Republic – apparently weren't enough of a wake-up call. The defeated parties have not regained popularity, and some, like the German Social Democrats, have slid further down in the polls.

The centre left collapsed in the Italian election, letting two populist parties take the reins. In Sweden, the Social Democrat-led government saw diminished support in an inconclusive election and is unable to keep governing.

In the United Kingdom, the Labour Party was unable to wrest power from the squabbling, poorly led Tories, largely because it is itself divided on major issues such as Brexit and the desirable degree of wealth redistribution. Far away in Brazil, the Workers' Party lost the presidential election.

Just five European Union countries are still ruled by centre-left or leftist governments – Greece, Slovakia, Malta, Portugal and Spain. Only Spain's Socialists won power last year, and not in an election but rather in an unusual parliamentary coup. In Greece, the leftist bloc Syriza will probably lose power this year, and in Spain, centre-right parties are better positioned than the Socialists for the next election, whenever it comes.

In this year's European Parliament election, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats – the centre-left umbrella party – is projected to be the biggest loser, and while the more modern and more radical European United Left-Nordic Green Left is expected to gain a few seats, that won't be nearly enough to help the entire leftist spectrum recoup its losses.

WHY THE LEFT FAILED

There are three accepted explanations for this litany of woes. One, popular among leftists themselves, is that the traditional parties took a wrong turn somewhere. In his 2017 book, *Wrong Turnings: How The Left Got*

Lost, the British economist and business professor Geoffrey Hodgson argues that, after making compromises with capitalism since the 1950s, the socialist and labour parties have failed to offer a "persuasive, feasible and democratic alternative to capitalism" after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Another view has to do with the changing class structure of society. Its proponents argue that the old working class is gone, taking with it the traditional base of the leftist parties united by class consciousness and by the institutions that supported it, from labour unions to choral societies and women's clubs.

"First, the emancipation of the working class – primarily the extension of access to higher education – changed the working class and its dependence on left-wing subcultures and organisations," political scientist Jan Rovny of Sciences Po in Paris wrote in a London School of Economics blog post last year. "Second, the left's enabling of the search for rights allowed younger generations to seek personal liberation from traditional hierarchies, including those of the left."

By this thinking, the old proletariat has been replaced at the bottom of the class hierarchy by a new precariat, people working in the service economy with few chances and little desire to organise. They are often immigrants separated from each other by cultural divides and sometimes disenfranchised. The traditional left has had little to offer them.

The third concept is more radical than the first two. It posits a collapse of the entire traditional left-right paradigm, describing it as too simplistic for today's complex matrix of factors affecting political preferences.

Social scientists Yann Algan, Elizabeth Beasley, Daniel Cohen and Martial Foucault analysed this matrix earlier last year using a detailed data set from the 2017 French presidential election.

They saw people with lower-than-average incomes for their level of education voting hard left, for Mr Jean-Luc Melenchon, and people with higher incomes than their education level going for the centre-right (Mr Francois Fillon).

They noted that people with lower interpersonal trust went for Mr Melenchon if they had higher life satisfaction, and for nationalist populist Marine Le Pen if they were less happy with their lives.

The ideological divides that used to match class lines have also shifted: For example, though the supporters of Ms Le Pen were as unlikely to be wealthy as those of Mr Melenchon, the nationalist's voters were not particularly interested in redistribution.

The three explanations of the traditional left's demise approach the same problem from different angles. The structure of society has changed for a number of reasons: Broader access to education, deindustrialisation, migratory flows, the success of social policies pursued by the same leftist parties that are suffering now at the polls.

At the same time, the toolbox for describing and measuring societal divides, and for exploiting them for political purposes, has improved dramatically with the rise of data science and social networks.

The leftist parties, meanwhile, have failed to use this toolbox to offer compelling ideas to the social groups that might be willing to support them.

I'm not a leftist by any definition. No one who grew up in the Soviet Union, as I did in Moscow in the 1970s and 1980s, can be one without amnesia-inducing drugs. State-run redistribution will always turn into a corrupt, wasteful system that fails to make anyone happy regardless of how much repression is involved.

That said, I have a stake in the survival of the traditional left in the Western world. It has a proven record of making societies fairer, holding back imperial impulses, shortening wars. It has been a useful counterbalance to the natural inclination of the traditional right to support big

The leftist parties should seize the opportunity to learn and experiment rather than wait for the old support levels to come back. They won't. If this opportunity is missed, the Western world is in for years of conservative or fractured governments trying to fight or appease leaderless movements like the Yellow Vests, which they don't really understand.

business, the military and law-enforcement machines.

HOW THE LEFT CAN REGAIN ITS WAY

The traditional left does not have to give up these important roles. What it requires is clarity on three issues: Who it stands for, what it stands for and how to communicate the ideas.

The new potential support base includes diverse groups. Three of these are government employees who believe in the positive mission of the state; creative classes and intellectuals who stand for freedom, diversity and a massive role for educational institutions; a precarious working class that feels ill treated by a system rigged in favour of the rich. All of them share an interest in one thing: Fairness.

Many leaders on the left understand this, and Mr Martin Schulz, a German Social Democratic candidate for chancellor in 2017, even chose More Fairness as his slogan.

The reason he lost was that he could not explain what the word meant to him and how he was going to deliver fairness to the different target groups. In such a situation, the government employees, intellectuals and students tend to vote for environmentalist parties like the German Greens, which share their sensibilities.

Many of the insecure workers go for the nationalist populists who address the issue of fairness in the simplest terms: A country, according to them, must help its own first.

There are, meanwhile, ways to address the concerns of all the potential audiences while advocating clear policies. The Dutch GreenLeft, which did unexpectedly well in the 2017 election and has increased its popularity since, provides an important example.

It's the product of a merger of four progressive parties that stressed different aspects of socialism and environmentalism but found ways to combine both. Merging with Greens can be a productive way forward for the traditional left, since voters appear to move freely between them. In Germany, for example, the decline of the Social Democrats has led to the rise of the Greens, who replaced them as the nation's second most popular party this year.

The GreenLeft has departed from traditional redistribution ideas; the party proposes programmes that stress getting the underprivileged into training and work rather than providing more financial support for them. While calling for more education spending, it actually advocates a smaller government and a more streamlined political system, catering to the anti-elite mood of the struggling lower middle class.

A combination of "green" goals with leftist sensibilities could be an answer to movements like France's Yellow Vests. Instead of fuel taxes, which set off violent protests because they have an immediate, direct effect on the tightest family

budgets, such hybrid parties want to extract environmental taxes primarily from big corporations.

Though the effect of higher corporate taxation would trickle down to the poor, too, the framing of the matter is less likely to cause protest – especially if investments in public transportation come through, as these parties promise.

The coalition government in Luxembourg, headed by a centre-right party but also including a leftist one and a green one, proposes to make public transportation free in the small country next year, a highly popular move that is likely to boost the government's staying power.

A focus on fairness should probably mean less of a focus on political correctness. Social liberalism has prevented politicians on the left from talking freely about the dark side of immigration. That has not helped immigrants much. In many countries, they have been pushed out of sight into areas the locals avoid and left to suffer the consequences of poor policing, lacking social services and labour-market discrimination.

That has little to do with fairness; punishing crime is fair, and so is linking social support to positive, lasting labour-market outcomes.

Being pro-refugee, as most leftist and environmentalist politicians are, should not tie the leadership's tongues in knots, something the intellectual audience has learnt to accept but resentful workers hate.

Parties led by young leaders, such as the Dutch GreenLeft's Jesse Klaver, 32, have been good at communicating ideas to diverse target groups on social media.

So far, traditional leftist parties have largely left this field to populists, who find the social networks a convenient tool for spreading divisive messages.

But nothing is preventing the left from taking the war to them in a way that helps them win elections. Traditional, offline networks – those unions and choral societies – are no match for Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and leftist parties have been too slow to realise this.

This time of desperation for the traditional left is a time for bold alliances, primarily with the Greens, and for clear ideas promoted cleverly with specific target groups in mind.

The leftist parties should seize the opportunity to learn and experiment rather than wait for the old support levels to come back. They won't. If this opportunity is missed, the Western world is in for years of conservative or fractured governments trying to fight or appease leaderless movements like the Yellow Vests, which they don't really understand. That prospect alone should give believers in the leftist ideal of fairness an itch to get their act together. WASHINGTON POST

• Leonid Bershidsky is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering European politics and business. He was the founding editor of the Russian business daily Vedomosti and founded the opinion website Slon.ru.

BIG PICTURE



WEATHER
Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 33 deg C **Low** 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 25 to 43 (Good)



PHOTO: XINHUA

Dawn of a new year

A girl performing a ribbon dance early in the morning to welcome the new year in the town of Dongli, part of Yiyuan county, in China's eastern Shandong province yesterday. People across China celebrated

the start of 2019 yesterday in a variety of ways – from dragon dances at the Great Wall of China, to traditional drum performances in the city of Zaozhuang in Shandong, and a race around the city of Hengyang in Hunan province.

According to China News Service, close to 100,000 people from across China gathered at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in freezing temperatures to witness a flag-raising ceremony in the morning yesterday.

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Moneylenders test all-seeing eye of big data

Firms exploring use of digital footprint to forecast default risk

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

An algorithm that reads your social media feed, gets a fix on your digital personality and analyses your on-line interactions with friends and family may now be able to determine if you get a loan.

The idea of using personal data to forecast a person's likelihood of default is being explored by some licensed moneylending firms here in what is an industry first.

The Law Ministry selected six firms last month to pilot new business models for moneylending while also temporarily lifting a 2012 moratorium on new licences needed to operate in the sector.

Its moves come as personal loans are on the rise. Singaporeans accumulated nearly \$60 billion of debt, excluding housing, credit cards and car loans, in the third quarter of last year.

The key factor for moneylenders is the credit score, which is used to discern a person's financial reliabil-

ity based on his credit track record and income levels.

But determining risk of non-repayment, even with the already strong credit bureau that Singapore has, is not an exact science, say those participating in the trial.

Credit reports may not necessarily reflect a borrower's immediate financial situation, such as when they have lost a job recently, said Minterest co-founder Ronnie Chia.

Psychometric analysis, which feeds on social media and other on-line data from borrowers, allows lenders to determine the character and personality traits of borrowers.

These are important indications of the willingness to repay loans, said Mr Chia.

Mr Jonathan Chong, IFS Capital's vice-president of business planning and analysis, said lenders will be able to assess the borrower better and faster by considering these additional data points.

"With permission, we can overlay the digital footprint of a user, including social and professional connections, with the personal and financial data to help us form a more holistic picture of the (borrower)," said Mr Chong.

A more positive credit score means a borrower will get a more

MORE HOLISTIC PICTURE

With permission, we can overlay the digital footprint of a user, including social and professional connections, with the personal and financial data to help us form a more holistic picture of the (borrower).

MR JONATHAN CHONG, IFS Capital's vice-president of business planning and analysis, on better and faster assessment.

favourable interest rate that reflects his risk profile, said Mr Chia.

But there are dangers in giving the computer full autonomy in deciding whether a person is likely to go into delinquency, given that the accuracy of AI-driven risk assessments is sometimes questionable.

United States-based non-profit organisation ProPublica found how risk scores produced by artificial intelligence were unable to accurately tell if a defendant is likely to commit a future crime, even though these scores are already used in US courtrooms to guide judges during sentencing.

Its 2016 study found that the algorithm, which was developed by a private company, was "remarkably unreliable" – only one in five people flagged as likely to commit violent crime went on to do so.

It also found that the system unfairly pegged African-American defendants to be at a higher risk of committing crime than white Americans.

And even when accurate, the use of credit scores to determine risk and reward can be controversial.

China's newly deployed social credit system, for instance, has been decried as Orwellian by critics for penalising everyday behaviour.

Chinese citizens have been barred from buying flight and train tickets or purchasing property in recent months due to a low score from loan defaults or other activities deemed to be anti-social.

These dangers are why there is a need for the Law Ministry's pilot, so that the personal lending industry can find out what safeguards are necessary as it heads towards the adoption of AI and big data analytics, said Mr Edmund Sim, founder of fintech start-up Credit Culture.

However, even detractors of AI cannot deny the superhuman efficiency of computer algorithms, big data and machine learning employed in various industries today.

Humans can get it wrong even without AI, and they do so while incurring higher costs that will eventually show up on the borrower's bill.

In a demonstration at his Craig Road office, Mr Sim showed The Straits Times how its credit scoring engine analyses and scores applicants for their creditworthiness almost instantly.

He declined to give specifics on the algorithms used as they are proprietary to the firm.

While accuracy is a concern, machine beats man on one key element – algorithms apply their standards universally and eliminate any form of bias associated with human intervention, said Mr Sim.

"Technology can benefit consumers by making things simpler, cheaper and more transparent, allowing them to make better informed decisions," he noted.

"The question now is the extent to which technology can be used in personal lending."

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China's property slowdown dragging down the economy

JURONG (China) • For Mr Hu Peiliang, Jurong, a 45-minute drive from Nanjing, was a city of cranes, concrete and opportunity. He was so sure it was on the cusp of a boom that last year he moved his family there.

On an overcast day last November, Mr Hu, 31, a real estate agent, pointed to one new building after another as evidence. New city blocks have been built, crosswalks and streetlights erected overnight. One development straddling several blocks called Yudong International will include 120 buildings when completed.

But who will buy all those apartments? Mr Hu paused before answering: "I was wondering that myself." Since last July, he has sold only a handful.

Unwanted apartments are weighing on China's economy – and, by extension, dragging down growth around the world.

Property sales are dropping. Developers who bet big on continued good times are now staggering under billions of dollars of debt.

"The prospects for the property market are grim," Mr Xiang Songzuo, a senior economist at Renmin University, said during a lecture at Renmin Business School last month.

"The property market is the biggest grey rhino," he said, referring to a term the government has used to describe visibly big problems in the Chinese economy that are disregarded until they start gaining momentum.

China is grappling with an economic slowdown brought on by efforts to curb debt and worsened by the trade fight with the US. But any solution will have to contend with the country's property problems.

More than one in five apartments in Chinese cities – roughly 65 million – sit unoccupied, estimates Professor Gan Li of Southwestern University of Finance and Economics in Chengdu. "We are already in a difficult economic situation. The decline will only get worse," he said.

In places like Jurong, home owners are paying the price. Some property developers have slashed prices on new apartments. That undercuts the property values of earlier buyers, who increasingly are taking to the streets to protest.

Last October, dozens of buyers in Jurong gathered outside the sales office of Centre Park, a 22-building residential complex pitched by developer Country Garden as China's



The Yudong International complex in Jurong, China. A glut of apartments across the country is partly blamed for a slowdown in the world's second-largest economy – and, by extension, dragging down growth around the world. In some places, home owners are taking to the streets in protest. PHOTO: NYTIMES

version of Central Park in Manhattan. Security guards barricaded the entrance to prevent protesters from storming the building to demand their money back.

"I am very angry," said Mr Jia Rui, 24, who bought a Centre Park apartment a year ago. He watched last year as property prices rose for months before deciding to buy the apartment, which will be bigger than the one he currently lives in with his wife and parents.

When he learnt that similar apartments were later being sold at nearly half the price, Mr Jia said he felt helpless.

"It is not possible to get a refund," he said. Then again, he added, Jurong will have a subway line connecting it to Nanjing, a major city, by 2023. "Maybe the price will go back up by then," he said.

China's property market has long been a wild ride, driven by speculation from property developers and homebuyers alike and made worse by government efforts to tame prices if they get too high, and juice sales if they get too low.

The current slowdown stems in large part from a three-year building spree driven by a surge in prices in many cities. Officials struggled to contain a white-hot property market with measures that included open consideration of a national property tax.

"You never know when the music will stop, so you try to do as much as possible before the music stops," said Ms Nicole Wong, a property an-

alyst at CLSA, a stock brokerage.

Housing is key to China's well-being. It accounts for roughly one-fifth to one-third of China's economic growth, depending on whether ancillary industries like construction and furniture-making are included.

Property is the largest source of wealth for households, a given in a country with strict rules against moving money overseas and a volatile stock market. In major cities, it sometimes accounts for as much as 85 per cent of a family's assets, according to researchers at Southwestern University.

That store of wealth is looking increasingly shaky. Sales in terms of gross floor area on the market have dropped sharply since last September. The share of apartments in new developments that are being sold has plunged since the summer. The number of failed land auctions has doubled this year, indicating that developers are unwilling or unable to buy land for new projects.

Now people are angry, and Chinese officials and property developers are doing something about it. In recent months, officials have loosened mortgage requirements, eased restrictions on when homeowners can resell their properties and made it easier for university students to continue living in the cities where they are studying after they graduate, potentially increasing housing demand. In some cities, property developers have cut deals with homebuyers to give them back the differ-

ence between the current price and the one they originally paid.

As housing prices begin to fall, some buyers have made their displeasure known.

Jurong, a small city of 600,000 people, represents a bet by homebuyers that a buoyant market in Nanjing will spread to surrounding areas. Many homebuyers are retired workers or farmers who have moved to the city.

Today, the city appears to be preparing for a future in which its population more than doubles. There are 19 other projects like Centre Park.

Country Garden, the developer behind Centre Park and other residential complexes around the country, has endured slumping sales and has slashed prices. It has faced fury from buyers, some of whom have taken to smashing in the windows of sales offices in at least one city, according to the local media.

Mr Hu, the real estate agent in Jurong, and his friend Wang Liwei were selling homes in Nanjing before they decided to make the move to Jurong. If prices were so high in Nanjing, it seemed only logical to both men that prospective buyers who were unable to afford a place there – or who were locked out of the market because of residential restrictions – would look to Jurong. The government's plan to build a metro system made the city even more appealing.

At first they were right. In 2016, some 49,000 apartments were sold in Jurong, a remarkable number for a city where the annual average is closer to 4,000, according to Mr Li Huifeng, a research director at the Purple Mountain Digital New Media Research Institute in Nanjing. Mr Hu added: "Mostly it's buyers who are looking for investments. They see opportunities here."

Hundreds of buildings sprang up. Now, these partly constructed buildings have a ghost town feel.

At the Centre Park development site, green netting drapes over a dozen half-built apartment buildings, construction cranes on top of each. Men with white gloves stand at the sales office, from which soft jazz music is playing, waiting to greet prospective buyers. But there are few customers.

At the back of the office, a dozen real estate agents sit around coffee tables and stare at their phones.




After a tour of the show apartments, Mr Wang said quietly: "I wouldn't buy an apartment from them." NYTIMES

Jobs in demand

Software developers, shop sales assistants and teachers are in hot demand in Singapore, according to preliminary data from the Manpower Ministry released last month. Here are some of the top jobs that companies are looking to hire for from the 11 major industries here, based on vacancies as at September.

Industry	No. of job vacancies
MANUFACTURING	
 Machine-tool setter-operator	510
Industrial & production engineer	290
Manufacturing engineering technician	290
CONSTRUCTION	
 Civil engineering/Building construction labourer	300
Building & construction project manager	80
Carpenter & joiner	70
WHOLESALE & RETAIL TRADE	
 Shop sales assistant	1,240
Commercial & marketing sales executive	180
Cashier & ticket clerk	170
TRANSPORTATION & STORAGE	
 Material & freight handling worker	290
Heavy truck & lorry driver	240
Receptionist, customer service & information clerk	180
ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES	
 Waiter	800
Cook	520
Cleaner & helper in hotels & related establishments	240
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS	
 Software, Web & multimedia developer	550
Systems analyst	450
Information technology project manager	110



Industry	No. of job vacancies
FINANCIAL & INSURANCE SERVICES	
 Financial/Investment adviser	600
Operations officer (except transport operations)	360
Compliance officer/Risk analyst (financial)	340
REAL ESTATE SERVICES	
 Industrial establishment cleaner	50
Premises & facilities maintenance officer	50
Housekeeper & related worker	50
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	
 Accountant	200
Electronics engineering technician	120
Accounting associate professional	110

Industry	No. of job vacancies
ADMINISTRATIVE & SUPPORT SERVICES	
 Security guard	1,390
Cleaner in places like schools and hospitals	630
Food & beverage establishment cleaner	250
COMMUNITY, SOCIAL & PERSONAL SERVICES	
 Teaching & training professional	1,330
Healthcare assistant	510
Management executive	420

NOTES:
• Data is for private sector establishments with at least 25 employees and the public sector.
• Number of job vacancies are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source: MINISTRY OF MANPOWER
PHOTO: ST FILE
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Wall Street stocks end their worst year since 2008

Worries shake confidence in 2018; late-season collapse raises doubts over 2019 outlook

NEW YORK • The United States stock market on Monday concluded its worst year since the global financial crisis, following a late-season collapse that also raised doubts about the prospects for this year.

Major indices notched modest gains in the year's final session, but it barely made a dent, compared with the rest of December, the market's worst month in nearly a decade.

Ending in the red for 2018 did not appear on the cards in the first weeks of the year, when Wall Street repeatedly shot to new records on the heels of a sweeping tax cut signed into law in December 2017 by President Donald Trump.

But it did not take long for a host of worries to shake that confidence, from unease over an unpredictable series of trade wars launched by Mr Trump, to angst over rising interest rates, to nervousness over economists' warnings of slowing growth, or worse, a possible recession.

And the declines rapidly accelerated in the final weeks of last year, erasing all the gains since January.

Concluding the year with losses is "astonishing", Manulife senior portfolio manager Nate Thooft told Agence France-Presse. "From an investor perspective, it probably shakes them a bit."

There was a spurt of renewed optimism on Monday, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average finished the final session with a gain of 1.2 per cent at 23,327.46. The broad-based S&P 500 climbed 0.9 per cent to end at 2,506.85, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index advanced 0.8 per cent to 6,635.28.

But even with Monday's boost, the Dow finished last year with a loss of 5.6 per cent compared with the end of 2017, the S&P 500 with a drop of 6.2 per cent and the Nasdaq with a decline of 3.9 per cent.

That was after a year in which the indices jumped 25.1 per cent, 19.4 per cent and 28.2 per cent – before companies logged massive jumps in profits last year due in part to the tax cut.

At the start of last year, investor sentiment ranged somewhere between optimism and euphoria as the Dow surged above 25,000 for



It did not take long for a host of worries to shake that confidence, from unease over an unpredictable series of trade wars launched by Mr Donald Trump, to angst over rising interest rates, to nervousness over economists' warnings of slowing growth, or worse, a possible recession.

the first time and then hit 26,000 less than two weeks later.

But after that frothy start, stocks experienced their first cracks in late January, just ahead of a leadership transition at the Federal Reserve as Mr Jerome Powell took over as Fed chairman, after Mr Trump declined to nominate Ms Janet Yellen for a second term.

Wall Street suffered an especially

profound wobble on Mr Powell's first day, Feb 5, with the Dow plunging nearly 1,600 points at one stage before ending a grim session down more than 4 per cent.

At the time, analysts cited worries that the Fed would have to hike rates too aggressively.

But Mr Trump's escalating trade wars and tariff threats soon took over. He announced the first salvo on March 1: tariffs on imported steel and aluminium.

The following day, on Twitter, he proclaimed that "trade wars are good, and easy to win". That has been followed by increasingly aggressive tariff moves against China.

Many key US economic indicators stayed robust even as business leaders recoiled at Mr Trump's rising protectionism, with unemployment lingering at a 49-year low, corporate earnings notching their strongest growth in eight years, and business and consumer sentiment remaining well above historic trends.

In August, the S&P 500 celebrated the longest-ever "bull market", with 3,453 straight sessions – more than nine years – without a drop of 20 per cent. In October, the Dow surged to

an all-time high of 26,828.39. But it has been a rough ride since.

Besides worries over US-China trade talks, much angst is focused on the Federal Reserve, which faces a tricky balancing act of boosting interest rates enough to contain inflation without choking off the economic expansion.

Market watchers are always nervous about Fed tightening cycles, especially as they reach their end, fearing they might overdo it. But Mr Trump has dialled up the jitters with repeated attacks on Mr Powell.

White House officials have denied Mr Trump intends to fire Mr Powell. But market watchers say the possibility has further pressured stocks. A US government shutdown over Mr Trump's desire to fund a wall along the border with Mexico extending into 2019 also dented sentiment.

"To be clear, the challenges we see ahead don't look to us like the makings of another financial crisis," said a recent investor note by JPMorgan Private Bank said.

"Our base case assumes slowing growth in the US economy throughout 2019 and a moderate recession in 2020," AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Traders at the New York Stock Exchange on the last day of the trading year on Monday. Despite the day's boost, the Dow Jones Industrial Average finished last year with a loss of 5.6 per cent compared with the end of 2017, the S&P 500 with a drop of 6.2 per cent and the Nasdaq with a decline of 3.9 per cent. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

US Treasury yield ends stormy year lowest in 10 months

NEW YORK • Bond traders still clinging to their desks right into a volatile year end are driving Treasury yields to multi-month lows across the curve.

The 10-year yield dipped below 2.7 per cent on Monday, into territory last seen in the teeth of last February's volatility spike.

The benchmark rate has been on a sliding trend for most of the fourth quarter, spurred by an equity-market sell-off that, at one point, left the S&P 500 index almost 20 per cent below its record level.

A surprisingly weak Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas manufacturing survey and softer oil prices were among the few catalysts to be found on Monday, with trading closing early ahead of the New Year's Day holiday.

FTN Financial strategist Jim Vogel said these factors may have highlighted value in the longer end of the curve following an aggressive repricing in short-term rates since last month's Fed meeting.

"It took quite a long time for the rest of the Treasury curve to respond to that, so now there are parts of the real yield curve that are too steep," he said. However, he doesn't expect to see deeper lows in benchmark yields as activity picks up this month.

"In Formula One racing, if a driver's about to crash, he takes his hands off the wheel so his arms don't get broken – after the Fed, traders took their hands off the wheel," Mr Vogel said. "But in January, they're going to have to get serious about what's the plan in this new market."

BLOOMBERG

CURVE TOO STEEP

It took quite a long time for the rest of the Treasury curve to respond to that, so now there are parts of the real yield curve that are too steep.

FTN FINANCIAL STRATEGIST
JIM VOGEL



VOLUNTARY CONDITIONAL GENERAL OFFER

by

Konnectivity Pte. Ltd.
(Company Registration No.: 20182874H)
(Incorporated in the Republic of Singapore)
a company jointly owned by Keppel Corporation Limited and Singapore Press Holdings Limited
to acquire all the issued and paid-up ordinary shares in the capital of

M1 Limited
(Company Registration No.: 199206031W)
(Incorporated in the Republic of Singapore)
other than those already owned, controlled or agreed to be acquired by Konnectivity Pte. Ltd.,
its related corporations and their respective nominees

OFFER ANNOUNCEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Pre-Conditional Offer. Konnectivity Pte. Ltd. (the "Offeror") refers to the announcement (the "Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement") dated 27 September 2018 (the "Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date") pursuant to which it was announced by the Offeror that, subject to the satisfaction of the Pre-Condition (as defined in the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement), the Offeror intends to make:

1.1.1 a voluntary conditional general offer (the "Offer") for all the issued and paid up ordinary shares in the capital of M1 Limited (the "Company" or "M1") (excluding treasury shares) ("Shares"), other than those Shares already owned, controlled, or agreed to be acquired by the Offeror, its related corporations, and their respective nominees, in accordance with Rule 15 of the Singapore Code on Take-overs and Mergers (the "Code"); and

1.1.2 an Options Proposal to the Optionholders (as defined in paragraph 3.1 of this Announcement) if the Offer is made. A copy of the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement is available on the website of the Singapore Exchange Securities Trading Limited (the "SGX-ST") at <http://www.sgx.com>.

Capitalised terms that are not defined in this Announcement shall have the meanings set out in the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement. **Update on Pre-Condition.** As at the date of this Announcement (the "Offer Announcement Date"), the Pre-Condition has been satisfied. Accordingly, the Offeror wishes to announce its firm intention to make the Offer.

2. THE OFFER

2.1 Principal Terms of the Offer. Subject to the terms and conditions of the Offer to be set out in the formal offer document to be issued in respect of the Offer (the "Offer Document"), the Offeror will make the Offer in accordance with Rule 15 of the Code on the following basis:

2.1.1 Offer Shares. The Offer will be extended to all the Shares, other than those Shares already owned, controlled, or agreed to be acquired by the Offeror, its related corporations and their respective nominees (the "Offer Shares") at the Offer Price (as defined in paragraph 2.1.2 of this Announcement). For the avoidance of doubt, the Offer will be extended, on the same terms and conditions, to all Shares owned, controlled or agreed to be acquired by parties acting or deemed to be acting in concert with the Offeror (other than the Offeror's related corporations and their respective nominees). For the purpose of the Offer, the expression "Offer Shares" shall include all such Shares.

The Offer will also be extended to all new Shares unconditionally issued or to be issued prior to the final closing date of the Offer (the "Closing Date") pursuant to:

(i) the valid exercise of outstanding options granted by the Company (the "Options") pursuant to the M1 Share Option Scheme 2002 which was approved and adopted by Shareholders on 8 November 2002 and the M1 Share Option Scheme 2013 which was approved and adopted by Shareholders on 5 April 2013 (collectively, the "Option Schemes"); and

(ii) the valid vesting and release of any outstanding awards granted under the M1 Share Plan 2016 ("Awards") which was approved and adopted by Shareholders on 6 April 2016.

For the purposes of the Offer, the expression "Offer Shares" shall include all such Shares.

2.1.2 Offer Consideration. The consideration for each Offer Share will be as follows:

For each Offer Share: S\$2.06 in cash (the "Offer Price").

2.1.3 No Encumbrances. The Offer Shares are to be acquired (i) fully paid; (ii) free from any claim, charge, pledge, mortgage, encumbrance, lien, option, equity, power of sale, declaration of trust, hypothecation, retention of title, right of pre-emption, right of first refusal, moratorium or other third party right or security interest of any kind or an agreement, arrangement or obligation to create any of the foregoing; and (iii) together with all rights, benefits and entitlements attached thereto as at the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date and thereafter attaching thereto, including but not limited to the right to receive and retain all dividends, rights, other distributions and/or return of capital (if any) declared, paid or made by the Company in respect of the Offer Shares (collectively, "Distributions") on or after the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date.

2.1.4 Adjustment for Distributions. Without prejudice to the foregoing, the Offer Price has been determined on the basis that the Offer Shares will be acquired with the right to receive any Distribution that may be declared, paid or made by the Company on or after the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date.

Accordingly, in the event any Distribution is or has been declared, paid or made by the Company in respect of the Offer Shares on or after the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date, the Offer Price payable to a Shareholder who validly accepts or has validly accepted the Offer ("Accepting Shareholder") shall be reduced by an amount which is equal to the amount of such Distribution, depending on when the settlement date in respect of the Offer Shares tendered in acceptance of the Offer by such Accepting Shareholder falls, as follows:

(i) if such settlement date falls on or before the books closure date for the determination of entitlements to the Distribution (the "Books Closure Date"), the Offer Price shall remain undisturbed for each such Offer Share, as the Offeror will receive the Distribution in respect of such Offer Share from the Company; and

(ii) if such settlement date falls after the Books Closure Date, the Offer Price for each Offer Share shall be reduced by an amount which is equal to the amount of the Distribution in respect of each Offer Share, as the Offeror will not receive the Distribution in respect of such Offer Share from the Company.

For the avoidance of doubt, the interim dividend of S\$0.052 per Share announced by the Company on 27 July 2018 and paid to Shareholders on 17 August 2018 will not be deducted from the Offer Price.

2.1.5 Minimum Acceptance Condition. The Offer will be conditional on the Offeror having received, by the close of the Offer, valid acceptances in respect of such number of Shares which, when taken together with Shares owned by the Offeror and parties acting or deemed to be acting in concert with it, will result in the Offeror and parties acting or deemed to be acting in concert with it holding more than 50 per cent. of the Shares or as the case may be, the close of the Offer (including any Shares which may be unconditionally issued pursuant to the valid exercise of the Options or the valid vesting and release of the Awards prior to the close of the Offer).

Accordingly, the Offer will not become or be capable of being declared unconditional as to acceptances until the close of the Offer, unless at any time prior to the close of the Offer, the Offeror has received valid acceptances in respect of such number of Offer Shares which will result in the Offeror and parties acting or deemed to be acting in concert with it holding such number of Shares amounting to more than 50 per cent. of the maximum potential issued share capital of the Company. For this purpose, the "maximum potential issued share capital of the Company" means the total number of Shares which would be in issue had all the outstanding Options been validly exercised and all the Shares under Awards been issued and delivered as at the date of such declaration.

Further information on the Offer and the terms and conditions upon which the Offer will be made will be set out in the Offer Document.

3. OPTIONS PROPOSAL

3.1 As at the Offer Announcement Date, based on the latest information available to the Offeror, there are 26,826,000 outstanding Options are exercisable into 26,826,000 Shares. Under the rules of the Option Schemes, the Options are not transferable by the holders thereof (the "Optionholders"). In view of this restriction, the Offeror will not make an offer to acquire the Options although, for the avoidance of doubt, the Offer will be extended to all new Shares unconditionally issued or to be issued pursuant to the valid exercise of any Options prior to the Closing Date. Instead, the Offeror will make a proposal (the "Options Proposal") to the Optionholders on the following terms, that subject to:

3.1.1 the Offer becoming or being declared unconditional in all respects; and

3.1.2 the relevant Options continuing to be exercisable into new Shares,

the Offeror will pay to such Optionholders a cash amount (as determined below) (the "Option Price") in consideration of such Optionholders agreeing:

(i) not to exercise any of such Options into new Shares; and

(ii) not to exercise any of their rights as Optionholders;

and in each case from the date of their acceptance of the Options Proposal to the respective dates of expiry of such Options. Further, if the Offer becomes or is declared unconditional, Optionholders who have accepted the Options Proposal will also be required to surrender their relevant Options for cancellation, if the Offer lapses or is withdrawn or if the relevant Options cease to be exercisable into new Shares, the Options Proposal will lapse accordingly.

3.2 The Option Price is computed on a "take-through" basis, in other words, the price to be paid for each Option will be the amount (if positive) of the Offer Price less the exercise price of the Option. If the exercise price of an Option is equal to or more than the Offer Price, the Option Price for each Option will be the nominal amount of S\$0.001.

3.3 For the avoidance of doubt, whilst the Options Proposal is conditional upon the Offer becoming or being declared unconditional in all respects, the Offer will not be conditional upon acceptances received in relation to the Options Proposal. The Offer and the Options Proposal are separate and mutually exclusive. The Options Proposal does not form part of the Offer, and vice versa. Without prejudice to the foregoing, if Optionholders exercise their Options in order to accept the Offer in respect of the new Shares to be issued pursuant to such exercise, they may not accept the Options Proposal in respect of such Options. Conversely, if Optionholders wish to accept the Options Proposal in respect of their Options, they may not exercise those Options in order to accept the Offer in respect of the new Shares to be issued pursuant to such exercise.

3.4 Details of the Options Proposal will be despatched to Optionholders no later than the date of despatch of the Offer Document.

4. AWARDS

As the Awards are not transferable by the holders thereof, the Offeror will not make an offer to acquire the Awards, although, for the avoidance of doubt, the Offer will be extended to all new Shares unconditionally issued or to be issued pursuant to the valid vesting and release of any outstanding Awards prior to the Closing Date.

5. INFORMATION ON THE OFFEROR, KCL, KT&T AND SPH

5.1 The Offeror. The Offeror is a company incorporated in Singapore for the purposes of making the Offer and its shareholders are Keppel Keppel Pte. Ltd. ("KCP"), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Keppel Corporation Limited ("KCL"), and SPH Multimedia Private Limited ("SMPL"), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Singapore Press Holdings Limited ("SPH"). The Offeror has not carried on any business since its incorporation, except for matters in connection with making the Offer. As at the Offer Announcement Date:

5.1.1 the Offeror has an issued share capital of S\$10 comprising 10 issued ordinary shares ("Offer Shares"), held as follows:

(i) KCP has an interest in 8 Offer Shares, representing 80 per cent. of the Offer Shares; and

(ii) SPH has an interest in 2 Offer Shares, representing 20 per cent. of the Offer Shares; and

5.1.2 the directors of the Offeror are: (i) Mr. Chan Hon Chew; (ii) Mr. Sebastian Lamy; (iii) Mr. Louis Lim; (iv) Ms. Janice Wu Sung Sung; and (v) Mr. Chua Hwee Song.

5.2 KCL and KPPL. Incorporated in Singapore and listed on the Main Board of the SGX-ST, KCL is a global multi-business company committed to providing solutions for sustainable urbanisation. The principal activities of the companies in KCL's group consist of: (i) offshore oil-rig construction, shipbuilding & shiprepair and conversion; (ii) environmental engineering, power generation, logistics and data centres; (iii) property development & investment; and (iv) investments and asset management. The subsidiaries of KCL include, amongst others: (a) Keppel Offshore & Marine Limited; (b) Keppel Land Limited; (c) Keppel Infrastructure Holdings Pte Ltd; (d) Keppel Telecommunications & Transportation Ltd ("KT&T"); and (e) Keppel Capital Holdings Pte Ltd. KPPL does not hold any Shares. Further details relating to KT&T are set out in paragraph 5.3 of this Announcement.

5.3 KT&T and KPPL. KT&T is a public company incorporated in Singapore and listed on the Main Board of the SGX-ST. As at the Offer Announcement Date:

5.3.1 KCL has an interest in 79.22 per cent. in the issued share capital of KT&T; and

5.3.2 KT&T has an interest in 178,864,000 Shares (representing approximately 19.32 per cent. of the Shares) which is held through Keppel Telecoms Pte Ltd ("KTPL") (its wholly-owned subsidiary). Accordingly, KCL is deemed interested in the Shares held by KTPL.

Each of KT&T and KPPL is a related corporation of the Offeror. As Shares already owned, controlled or agreed to be acquired by the Offeror's related corporations are excluded from the Offer, Shares which are owned, controlled or agreed to be acquired by KT&T or KPPL are excluded from the Offer. Pursuant to the terms of the KTPL Irrevocable Undertaking (as set out in paragraph 7.4 of this Announcement), KPPL has also undertaken not to tender any of its Shares in acceptance of the Offer.

5.4 SPH, SMPL and the Roll-over Arrangement. SPH is a public company incorporated in Singapore and listed on the Main Board of the SGX-ST. As at the Offer Announcement Date, SMPL holds 124,453,000 Shares (representing approximately 13.45 per cent. of the Shares) and SPH has a deemed interest in the 124,453,000 Shares held by SMPL.

Pursuant to the SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking (as set out in paragraph 7.1 of this Announcement), SMPL has undertaken to tender all of its Shares in acceptance of the Offer. SMPL has also agreed to waive its rights under Rule 30 of the Code to receive the cash consideration payable to it by the Offeror under the terms of the Offer in exchange for the issuance of new Offer Shares following the valid tender of all of SMPL's Shares in acceptance of the Offer (the "Roll-over Arrangement").

5.5 Post Closing Shareholding Adjustment, the Shareholders' Agreement and the JTA

5.5.1 The final shareholding percentages of KPPL and SMPL in the Offeror shall be adjusted after the close of the Offer by way of an issuance of new Offer Shares to SMPL and KPPL. The issuance of new Offer Shares will enable SMPL to have an effective interest in at least 13.45 per cent. of the Company, provided that:

(i) KPPL shall at all times have a shareholding interest in over 50 per cent. of the total number of Offeror Shares; and

(ii) SMPL shall at all times have a shareholding interest in at least 20 per cent. of the total number of Offeror Shares, collectively, the "Post Closing Shareholding Adjustment". Accordingly, depending on the level of acceptances for the Offer and the total number of Shares at the relevant time, it is expected that KPPL's shareholding interest in the Offeror shall range from a minimum of 56.17 per cent. to a maximum of 80 per cent. and SMPL's shareholding interest in the Offeror shall range from a minimum of 20 per cent. to a maximum of 43.83 per cent.

5.5.2 KCL and SPH have entered into a binding joint transaction agreement (the "JTA"), to, inter alia, provide for the mechanism to carry out the Post Closing Shareholding Adjustment and regulate the affairs of the Offeror in connection with the JTA.

5.5.3 KPPL, SMPL and KPPL have also entered into a binding shareholders' agreement ("Shareholders' Agreement") to, inter alia, regulate their relationship as concert parties in relation to the Company and agree on their voting rights in relation to certain matters which relate to the Company and its subsidiaries, including board representation rights, and to regulate KPPL's and SMPL's relationship inter se as shareholders of the Offeror.

5.5.4 The Securities Industry Council of Singapore (the "SIC") has confirmed that the Roll-over Arrangement, the Shareholders' Agreement, the JTA and the Post Closing Shareholding Adjustment do not constitute a special deal.

5.6 Shareholding in M1. As at the Offer Announcement Date, based on the latest information available to the Offeror, the Offeror and parties acting in concert with the Offer (including KPPL and SMPL) have an aggregate interest in 308,390,735 Shares (representing approximately 33.32 per cent. of the Shares).

6. INFORMATION ON THE COMPANY

6.1 Introduction. The Company is incorporated in Singapore and was listed on the Main Board of the SGX-ST on 4 December 2002. The principal activities of the Company and its subsidiaries are the provision of telecommunications services, international call centres and fixed services, retail sales of telecommunications equipment and accessories, and customer services.

6.2 Share Capital. As at the Offer Announcement Date, based on the latest information available to the Offeror, the Company has:

6.2.1 an issued and fully paid up share capital of S\$206,174,026.72, comprising 925,615,082 Shares with 11,822,700 treasury shares;

6.2.2 26,826,000 outstanding Options, which are exercisable into Shares; and

6.2.3 up to 595,300 Shares which are subject to the Awards. These Awards have been released and vested in tranches between 2018 and 2021.

Save as disclosed above, the Offeror is not aware of any outstanding instruments convertible into, rights to subscribe for, and options in respect of, securities which carry voting rights in the Company.

6.3 Directors of the Company. As at the Offer Announcement Date, the directors of the Company are as follows:

6.3.1 Mr. Danny Teoh Leong Kay, Non-Independent and Non-Executive Chairman;

6.3.2 Ms. Karen Koo Lee Wah, Non-Independent and Non-Executive Director;

6.3.3 Tan Sri Jamaludin Ibrahim, Non-Independent and Non-Executive Director;

6.3.4 Mr. Huang Chong Ping, Non-Independent and Non-Executive Director;

6.3.5 Mr. Huang Chong Ping, Independent Director;

6.3.6 Ms. Elaine Lee Xia Jiong, Independent Director;

6.3.7 Mr. Lionel Lim Chin Teck, Independent Director;

6.3.8 Mr. Moses Lee Kim Poo, Independent Director;

6.3.9 Mr. Tan Wah Yow, Independent Director; and

6.3.10 Mr. Guy Daniel Harvey Samuel, Independent Director.

7. SMPL IRREVOCABLE UNDERTAKING AND KTPL IRREVOCABLE UNDERTAKING

7.1 SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking. As at the Offer Announcement Date, the Offeror has received an undertaking from SMPL (the "SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking") pursuant to which SMPL, has, amongst other things, unconditionally and irrevocably undertaken, represented and warranted to the Offeror (i) to tender all of its Shares (representing approximately 13.45 per cent. of the Shares) in acceptance of the Offer; and (ii) not to accept (or permit the acceptance of) any competing offer.

7.2 Waiver of Consideration. As set out in paragraph 5.4 of this Announcement, pursuant to the Roll-over Arrangement, SMPL has agreed to waive its rights under Rule 30 of the Code to receive the cash consideration payable to it by the Offeror under the terms of the Offer in exchange for the issuance of new Offer Shares following the valid tender of all of SMPL's Shares in acceptance of the Offer.

7.3 Cancellation of SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking. The SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking shall lapse and be of no further force and effect on the date on which the Offer (including any revised or improved Offer by or on behalf of the Offeror) closes, lapses, fails to become or be declared unconditional or is withdrawn other than as a result of SMPL breaching its obligations under the SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking.

7.4 KTPL Irrevocable Undertaking. As at the Offer Announcement Date, the Offeror has received an undertaking from KPPL (the "KTPL Irrevocable Undertaking") pursuant to which KPPL, has, amongst other things, irrevocably undertaken to and confirmed with the Offeror (i) the concert party relationship between the Offeror and KPPL for the purposes of the Offer, (ii) not to tender any Shares (representing approximately 19.32 per cent. of the Shares) held by it in acceptance of the Offer, and (iii) not to accept (or permit the acceptance of) any competing offer.

7.5 No Other Undertakings. Save for the SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking and the KTPL Irrevocable Undertaking, as at the Offer Announcement Date, the Offeror has not received any undertaking from any party acting in concert with the Offeror to support or assist the Offer.

7.6 Available for Inspection. Copies of the SMPL Irrevocable Undertaking and the KTPL Irrevocable Undertaking are available for inspection at the offices of the Offeror at 1 HarbourFront Avenue #18-01, Keppel Bay Tower, Singapore 098632 during normal business hours from the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date until the date on which the Offer closes, lapses or is withdrawn in accordance with the provisions of the Code.

8. RATIONALE FOR THE OFFER

8.1 The Company is facing intensifying competition and industry disruption from the impending launch of a South Mobile Network Operator ("MNO"), as well as the launch of new Mobile Virtual Network Operators ("MVNO") in Singapore. Continuing the status quo risks stagnation and further decline in shareholder value

8.1.1 On 14 December 2016, the Info-communications Media Development Authority ("IMDA") announced that TPg Telecom Pte Ltd had made the winning bid for the new entrant spectrum auction, noting that the entry of the new MNO was expected to enhance innovation and competition in the Singapore telecommunications market.

8.1.2 Several MVNOs have also recently commenced operations in Singapore. On 8 July 2015, the Company announced that it had reached a MVNO agreement with Liberty Wireless, operating under the brand of Cricet Asia, while on 3 May 2018, MyRepublic and Starhub announced that they had formed a MVNO partnership.

8.1.3 The emergence of new entrants will intensify the competition in the Singapore telecommunications market, potentially leading to shifts in market share between competitors, as well as potential downward pressure on revenue generation and margins for MNOs as a time when sustained investments are required to ensure long-term competitiveness.

8.1.4 The decline in the share price of the Company following IMDA's announcements on the entry of a new MNO likely reflects the impending intensification of competition in the Singapore telecommunications market, and the potential risks to shareholder value of the Company in the status quo.

8.2 KCL and SPH, collaborating through the Offeror, seek to arrest the decline in M1 shareholder value through a combination of transformational efforts which are expected to take several years. Dividends from the Company could be affected during such time by the intensifying competition in the Singapore telecommunications market, as well as the allocation of resources required for these transformation efforts

8.2.1 The Offeror believes that to compete more effectively in the Singapore telecommunications industry, the Company, with the support of its Shareholders, would need to undertake a transformation requiring management commitment and allocation of resources.

8.2.2 KCL and SPH, collaborating through the Offeror, seek to undertake business changes at the Company, including but not limited to the digital transformation of the Company's operating platform, cost management initiatives in the Company's front and back-end operations, the exploration by the Company of balance sheet optimization initiatives to unlock value from underlying infrastructure, as well as growth initiatives into new markets and segments.

8.2.3 The anticipated business transformation is complex and expected to take a number of years. During such time, dividends from the Company could be affected by the intensifying competition in the Singapore telecommunications market, as well as the allocation of resources required for these transformation efforts.

8.3 The Offeror obtaining majority control will facilitate the business transformation of M1, and is in line with KCL's and SPH's long-term strategies

8.3.1 Today, neither KCL nor SPH have majority control of the Company. Gaining majority control through the Offer will enable KCL and SPH, collaborating through the Offeror, to support the Company's management to:

(i) compete effectively in the challenging Singapore telecommunications operating environment;

(ii) manage the business of the Company;

(iii) facilitate the implementation of strategic and operational changes; and

(iv) optimise the use of its management and capital resources.

8.3.2 Furthermore, the Offer will allow the Company to cooperate with KCL's other business units, and to harness the synergies of the multi-business group.

8.3.3 Conversely, the Company will complement KCL's mission as a solutions provider for sustainable urbanisation, and will allow KCL to leverage the Company as a connectivity platform to better meet the needs of KCL's customers. SPH also sees further opportunities to leverage on M1's mobile platform to offer on demand and ready digital content to better serve SPH's customers. KCL and SPH are confident that, further to the Offer and with the necessary transformational efforts, the Company can significantly improve its performance.

8.4 Opportunity for Shareholders who are not prepared to bear the risks associated with the complex business transformation to realise their investment in cash at a premium

8.4.1 Shareholders who are not prepared to bear the risks associated with the complex business transformation outlined above will benefit from the cash out provided through the Offer. The Offer provides an opportunity for Shareholders who wish to realise their investment in the Shares to do so in cash, at a premium to prevailing market prices prior to the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date and without incurring brokerage fees.

8.4.2 As set out in paragraph 10 of this Announcement, the Offer Price represents a premium of approximately:

(i) 26 per cent. over the last traded price per Share as quoted on the SGX-ST on 21 September 2018, being the last full trading day on which the Shares were traded on the SGX-ST prior to the Pre-Conditional Offer Announcement Date (the "Last Trading Date");

(ii) 30 per cent. over the volume weighted average price ("VWAP") of the Shares for the one (1)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date;

(iii) 29 per cent. over the VWAP of the Shares for the three (3)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date;

(iv) 22 per cent. over the VWAP of the Shares for the six (6)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date; and

(v) 18 per cent. over the VWAP of the Shares for the twelve (12)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date. The Offer Price also represents: (i) approximately 36 per cent. premium over the lowest closing price of S\$1.520 over the 52-week period preceding the Last Trading Date; and (ii) approximately 25 per cent. premium over the average target price per Share of S\$1.644 by equity research analysts covering the Company.

Offer Price: S\$2.06 per Share



Notes:

(1) Figures (other than the Offer Price) are based on data extracted from Bloomberg L.P. on 21 September 2018, being the Last Trading Date, and rounded to the nearest three (3) decimal places.

(2) Premium rounded to the nearest per cent.

9. OFFEROR'S INTENTIONS FOR THE COMPANY

The Offeror, following the close of the Offer, conduct a review of the Company's operations with the aim of implementing strategic and operational changes which will allow the Company to compete more effectively in the telecommunications sector. The Offeror's intention is to gain majority control of the Company. In the event the Free Float Requirement (as defined in paragraph 11.2 of this Announcement) is not satisfied, the Offeror does not intend to preserve the listing status of the Company and has no intention of undertaking or supporting any action to satisfy the Free Float Requirement.

The board of directors of the Offeror retains the flexibility at any time to consider any options in relation to the Company and its subsidiaries which may present themselves and which the board may regard to be in the interest of the Offeror.

Save as disclosed in this Announcement, the Offeror has no intention to (i) introduce any major changes to the business of the Company, (ii) re-deploy the fixed assets of the Company, or (iii) discontinue the employment of any of the existing employees of the Company and its subsidiaries, KCL and SPH in the ordinary course of business.

10. FINANCIAL EVALUATION OF THE OFFER

The Offer Price represents the following premia over the relevant closing prices and VWAP of the Shares on the SGX-ST:

Description	Benchmark Price (S\$) ⁽¹⁾	Premium over Benchmark Price ⁽²⁾
Last traded price per Share as quoted on the SGX-ST on the Last Trading Date (being 21 September 2018)	1.630	26%
VWAP per Share for the one (1)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date	1.586	30%
VWAP per Share for the three (3)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date	1.597	29%
VWAP per Share for the six (6)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date	1.691	22%
VWAP per Share for the twelve (12)-month period prior to and including the Last Trading Date	1.745	18%

Crazy-rich people: World's biggest winners and losers

S'porean billionaires fare best in US\$ terms, gaining US\$2.5b

The markets may be tanking, but that has not stopped plenty of mega-fortunes from being unearthed last year.

Singaporean billionaires put in a strong collective showing, while

American billionaires, as a group, were the biggest losers.

And despite the slide in global financial markets, individuals behind some rising enterprises have shone. The popularity of Fortnite, the

phenomenon that forced some into video game rehab, for example, gave gamemaker Tim Sweeney a US\$7.2 billion (\$9.8 billion) fortune this year.

Mr Autry Stephens has US\$11.4 billion after his closely held Endeavour Energy Resources attracted bids that valued the oil company at as much as US\$15 billion.

"It was a good year for wealth creation," said Mr Michael Zeuner, managing partner of WE Family Offices. "It was a tough year in financial markets, but for people who are creating wealth through companies, the economy itself is very strong."

Mr Sweeney and Mr Stephens were just two of the 31 individuals who vaulted onto the Bloomberg Billionaires Index last year, even as increasing global trade tensions and a downdraught in the markets saw half-a-trillion dollars of wealth on the ranking wiped out.

Ms Denise Coates, the British founder and chief executive officer of online bookmaker Bet365 Group, is another addition. She is nearly 10 times richer than Queen Elizabeth II, according to the ranking. However, market turmoil pushed

many wealthy people into the red.

The world's 500 richest people lost US\$451 billion last year – a sharp reversal from 2017 when they added US\$1 trillion to their fortunes.

Here are the billionaires who gained and lost last year.

WINNERS

Singaporean billionaires fared the best in dollar terms, gaining US\$2.5 billion. That pushed the wealth of the country's richest to a collective net worth of US\$38 billion.

Mr Jeff Bezos, the Amazon founder and richest man in the world, was last year's biggest gainer for the second year running – his net worth growing about US\$24 billion to US\$123 billion.

But even he was a loser in the second half of the year as stock markets were routed. From a September peak, Mr Bezos has since seen his fortune drop US\$45 billion.

Despite Chinese billionaires' total loss of nearly US\$76 billion, some of them still came out ahead, including Mr Lei Jun, founder of Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi. He trailed only Mr Bezos among the biggest gainers of last year, adding US\$8.6 billion to his fortune.

LOSERS

American billionaires saw the biggest loss this year, collectively dropping US\$76 billion, largely because of last month's market rout.

Mr Mark Zuckerberg saw the sharpest drop last year as Facebook veered from crisis to crisis. His net worth fell nearly US\$20 billion, leaving the 34-year-old with a US\$53 billion fortune.

China's Wang Jianlin, Jack Ma and Ma Huateng made up three of the 10 biggest losers last year.

Fifty people dropped off the index, including 11 from China or Hong Kong, nine from the US and four from Russia.

Among those who fell off the list were Mr Andrej Babis, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic whose fortune is derived from his chemical and agricultural company Agrofert, and Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska, whose net worth plunged to a record low as stock of Rusal fell on concern that the aluminum giant could halt some production because of US sanctions.

And 13 billionaires on the list died last year, including Microsoft's Paul Allen.

BLOOMBERG



Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos (top) was last year's biggest gainer, with his net worth growing US\$24 billion to US\$123 billion, while Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg's (above) net worth fell nearly US\$20 billion.



A casino at Studio City resort in Macau. December was the 29th straight month in which revenue in China's only legal gambling hub rose, versus the same month a year prior, according to data released yesterday by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination bureau. PHOTO: REUTERS

Macau casinos see 14% rise in gaming revenue for 2018

HONG KONG • Gambling revenue in Macau rose 14 per cent last year, the second consecutive year of gain as demand to wager in the Chinese territory continued to rebound from a prolonged slump.

December was also the 29th straight month in which revenue in China's only legal gambling hub rose, versus the same month a year prior, according to data released yesterday by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination bureau.

Revenue rose 16.6 per cent to 26.47 billion patacas (\$4.49 billion) versus the 10-15 per cent esti-

mates of analysts polled by Reuters.

Revenue for the full year was 302.85 billion patacas. It has stabilised since a period of decline, which coincided with a central government drive against conspicuous spending among public officials.

However, a China-US trade war and slowing Chinese economy will likely weigh on sentiment in the high-roller VIP segment, keeping further revenue gains in check, analysts said. Also, licences in the world's largest gambling hub start to expire next year, which would force all players to pitch for a spot

on the casino floor. With frayed trade relations dealing American giants Sands China, Wynn Macau and MGM China a weaker hand, home-grown names could try their luck.

For the Macanese government, this is a chance to push for change. Officials could shake up a strip highly concentrated in American hands, and may even allow an extra, seventh operator.

Today, three United States-owned names control more than 60 per cent of industry ebitda (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation), according

to JPMorgan. Galaxy Entertainment, Melco and SJM Holdings, set up in Macau, account for the rest.

Licences for Macau casino operators SJM Holdings and MGM China are set to expire in 2020, while contracts for the remaining four operators Galaxy Entertainment, Melco International, Sands China and Wynn Macau will end in 2022. The licences were first awarded in a complex process in the early 2000s. Government officials have said there may be a new public bidding process when they expire.

Nevertheless, casinos are bullish on the potential benefits from the opening last year of the longest sea-crossing bridge and tunnel linking Macau to Hong Kong and mainland China's Pearl River Delta.

Meanwhile, entrepreneurs in Asia's own Las Vegas are readying their bets. Suncity controls about half of all VIP gaming in the terri-

tory through its junket business, which organises glitzy escapades. It is expanding into casinos overseas and Mr Andrew Lo, executive director of its Hong Kong-listed unit, says the company would pursue a licence in Macau if given the chance.

Other home-grown aspirants include Golden Dragon and Macau Legend. The former owns "satellite" casinos, which strike deals with permit-holders to set up shop.

The authorities also hope the bridge will boost the development of Macau's convention and exhibition business and raise overnight visitation numbers, both of which help drive non-gaming revenue.

The special administrative region has been encouraging casino operators to diversify to help broaden its economic base. At present, tax from casinos accounts for over 80 per cent of the Macau government's total revenue. REUTERS

Company Briefs

Hyflux

Hyflux said on Monday that it has obtained approval from secured lender Maybank to extend the timeline for the divestment of its Tuaspring integrated water and power plant.

Maybank is now giving Hyflux until Jan 31, 2019, to execute a binding agreement with a successful bidder or investor, an extension of the Oct 29, 2018, deadline earlier agreed upon. The bank reserves the right to terminate the collaboration agreement if the new deadline is breached.

China Everbright Water

China Everbright Water will receive a total subsidy of 42.68 million yuan (\$8.5 million) from a government fund in China for the construction of three projects.

Zhenjiang Sponge City Construction PPP (Public-Private Partnership) Project was approved for the largest subsidy at 30.8 million yuan.

Jiangyin Chengxi Waste Water Treatment Project Phase III and Chengxi Project Phase III Pipeline Network Pump Station were approved for a subsidy of 11.88 million yuan.

Separately, a unit of the water-treatment company also received funding of 1.2 million yuan after being named a provincial environmental science hub of Shandong Province.

ISR Capital

ISR Capital's long-drawn-out \$3 million acquisition of a rare-earth mining asset in Madagascar will finally come to fruition as the company announced it waived a sale condition so as to proceed with the deal's completion.

This was scheduled to take place on or around Dec 31, 2018.

ISR, which has been on the Singapore Exchange's watch list since December 2017, has faced questions over its purchase of the 60 per cent stake in Tantalum Holding (Mauritius), which fully owns a unit that holds an exploration licence for a rare-earth mining concession in Madagascar.

The purchase has been in the works for more than two years.

The waived condition relates to ISR and the seller REO Magnetic agreeing on the project's cash flow budget and liquidity plan.

ISR will issue 747 million new shares at 0.4 cent apiece for the purchase, bringing the total number of shares in the company to nearly 3.91 billion.

€500 note to get last print run

PARIS • The euro zone is moving to stop the printing of €500 (\$5781) banknotes, the violet-coloured bills that the authorities fear are favoured by criminals, with most of the 19 nations in the currency bloc to halt issuing them next month.

The European Central Bank said on its website: "As of Jan 27, 2019, 17 of the 19 national central banks in the euro area will no longer issue €500 banknotes."

However, Austria and Germany will both continue printing these banknotes until April 26 "in order to ensure a smooth transition and

for logistical reasons", the ECB said.

The €500 notes in circulation remain legal tender and can be used to make payments.

The ECB announced in May 2016 it would halt issuing new €500 notes, saying then that it expected to do so around the end of 2018, due to "concerns that this banknote could facilitate illicit activities".

The largest-denomination banknote in the single currency area is one of the world's most valuable bills, alongside the 1,000 Swiss franc (\$1,386) note.

Because of its high value and portability, experts believe the €500 note

had become prized by criminals for money laundering and even terrorist financing, earning the nickname "Bin Laden" in some circles.

According to ECB statistics, €500 bills account for just 2.4 per cent of the total number of banknotes in circulation, but a little over 20 per cent of the total value. At the end of November, there were 521 million of the notes in circulation.

The €500 banknotes were actually last printed in 2014, with demand satisfied since from stocks.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



The ECB website said 17 of the 19 national central banks in the euro area will no longer issue €500 notes as of Jan 27. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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OBITUARIES

"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."
Psalm 73:26



KOH THIAM HOCK

Age: 80

was called home to be with the Lord on 31 Dec 2018
dearly missed by loved ones.

Wife: Yap Siew Tin

Son:
Jimmy Koh Chew Teck

Daughters:
Lily Koh Bee Ching
Koh Bee Bee

Grandsons:
Justin Koh
Jo-ern Koh
Dominic Yuan

Daughter-in-law:
Susan Low

Son-in-law:
Douglas Yuan

Granddaughters:
Charlene Koh
Dorothy Yuan

Siblings, nephews, nieces, relatives and friends.
Wake is held at Singapore Funeral Parlour Dahlia Hall level 3,
91, Tampines Link S'pore 528746.
Nightly services will be held at 8pm.
Cortege will leave on 4 Jan 2019 (Fri) at 1.20pm
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 2.20pm.

Malti Lalwani

6 November, 1966 — 31 December, 2018



*The love you gave amidst great struggle and pain
O that we could have entered
the threshold and nooks of your heart
To help you glimpse your greatness, to heal your spirit.*
— This poem is rededicated to Malti

Malti was a vibrant personality—a gifted actor and storyteller who brought light and life into any setting. She had a magical way with words and a kind heart, and always knew just the right words for laughter, comfort, and healing.

Malti is daughter to **Gobind & Pushpa Lalwani** (both deceased), and sister to **Ameet Lalwani** (deceased) and **Shalini Lalwani**. She was lovingly cared for by Feibe and Siriya.

Many heartfelt thanks to the teams at NUH and St Mark's Ward, Assisi Hospice for their dedicated care during Malti's journey home.

Condolence Prayers (Marko) will be held at Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sangh Sabha, 17 Wilkinson Road, on 3 January, 2019 from 5pm-6pm. After which, **family and friends are welcome to gather and remember Malti from 6pm-7pm.**
Light refreshments will be served.

"For god so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
John 3:16



YAP KWEE ANN BILLY

Age: 87

was called home to be with the Lord on 31 Dec 2018,
dearly missed by loved ones.

Wife: Quek Hock Lian (deceased)

Sons:
Yap Eng Huat Christopher
Yap Eng Kim Michael

Daughter:
Tee Chin Chew

Grand children:
Teo Yi Ming Alvin
Teo Yi Wei Bryan
Shana Yap Yen Ling
Natasha Yap Hui Ling
Anna Yap Jia Ling

Great grandchildren:
Teo Kai Xin Jolynn
Teo En Hao Ashton
Teo Wei Bin Aiden

Spouse:
Sarah Catherine Yap

Spouse:
Teo Kim Seng

Granddaughter-in-law:
Koh Hui Mim Joey

Wake set up 2pm onwards at
**Blk 38, Sin Ming Dr #01-545, Ang Yew Seng
Remembrance Hall S'pore 575712.**
Night Service will be held on
Thursday 3rd Jan 8pm.
Cortege will leave on 4 Jan 2019 (Fri) at 11.20am
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3
for cremation at 12.20pm.

5th Anniversary In Loving Memory Of



SINNADURAI TIRUCHELVAM

(Our Beloved Father, Mentor
and a Dear Friend)

Departed on 2nd January 2014

Dearly missed and fondly
remembered by
Management and Staff of
Tiger Hong Security Services
& Consultants Pte Ltd,
Federal Protectio'n
Investigacio'n Pte Ltd and
Singapore Ambulance Services
and Training Pte Ltd.

Obituaries

For enquiries,
call
1800-289-9988
(weekdays 8.30am
to 6.30pm)

•
6319-5192

ST Classifieds



SOH HOCK HWA

Age: 85

was called home to be with the Lord on 31.12.18
leaving behind loved ones.

Wife: Anna Seng Yew Lian

Daughter:
Cynthia Soh Hui Peng (deceased)

Sons:
Raymond Soh Kian Peng
Desmond Soh Kok Peng

Grandson:
Brayden Soh Jie Ern

Granddaughters:
Natasha Soh Hui Ern
Lauren Soh Li Ern

Son-in-law:
Colin Lee Kim Hin

Daughters-in-law:
Pamela Wong Mei Mei
Sarah Wong Sheau Wei

Wake is held at Blk 332, Tampines St 32, S(520332).
Service will be held on 4.1.2019 at 8pm.
Cortege leaves on 5.1.2019 (Saturday) at 12.45pm
for funeral service at Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 at 1.40pm
thereafter for cremation.



LEE WING KUM

Age: 91

passed away peacefully on 31 December 2018.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Low Ah On (Deceased)

Sons:
Lee Peng Wah Elson
Lee Heng Keong
Lee Heng Lum Desmond

Daughters:
Lee Fong Kwai
Lee Fong Kuen
Lee Fong Soon Corina

Daughters-in-law:
Thomas Corrine
Kiew Yoke Lin
Ng Kwai Leng

Son-in-law:
Ho Kok Seng Andrew (Deceased)

and Grandchildren, Great Grandchildren and all relatives.

Wake is held at Blk 52A Havelock Road
Singapore 161052 Multi Purpose Hall
Cortege will leave on 4 January 2019 (Friday)
at 10.00am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4
for cremation at 10.45am.

"In memoriam"
is for the loved
ones whom you
remember...

Vaithenatha Iyer Ganapathy
Age: 87
Passed away peacefully on 30 December 2018.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.
Wife: Ramanatha Iyer Parvathy

Children:
Subramania Sarma @ Raja
Letchmy @ Vani
Uma Maheswary
Anandhi
Annappoorani

Spouses:
Seetharaman @ Mohan
Ramakrishnan
Eligeson
Keshav

Grandchildren:
Vylasini, Vinish, Nikhil, Sanjay, Neeraja,
Shivani, Vijetha, Vittal and Ananth
And all relatives and friends.
Cremation on Friday 4 January 2019 at
Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 at 4.00pm.

**5th Anniversary
In Loving Memory of**

Sinnadurai Tiruchelvam
called to God on 2nd January 2014
Those we love don't go away.
They walk beside us everyday; unseen, unheard but
are always loved, missed and held close to heart.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by
Sister Thangamalar, Brother-in-law Jayaraj,
Nephew Kandan, Nieces Dharshini and Subashini,
and loved ones.
Prayers will be held in Sri Lanka.



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with loved ones & friends



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*It is the secret of the world
that all things
subsist and do not die,
but only retire from
sight and afterwards
return again.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Man may be a mere mortal, but his legacy lives on forever.
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SPORT

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SECONDS FLOYD MAYWEATHER'S BOUT WITH TENSIN NASUKAWA LASTED C7

OLE:
ALEXIS
CAN BE
UNITED
ASSET

Fit-again Chilean raring to prove himself as Red Devils thrive under new attacking tactics

LONDON • Ole Gunnar Solskjaer believes that Manchester United supporters will finally see the best of Alexis Sanchez because of the freedom that he has given his players since the sacking of Jose Mourinho. The United interim manager confirmed that the forward, who has not played since injuring a hamstring in November, is in line to make his first appearance in today's Premier League trip to Newcastle.

Sanchez has been determined to make a mark under the new manager and it was reported that he urged Solskjaer to pick him for the 4-1 win over Bournemouth on Sunday, even though the club's medical staff had not cleared him for a return to action.

"He's had some great training sessions the last few days," the Norwegian said. "He wanted to (play against Bournemouth) but we have to manage him, he's been out for a month. But he'll be involved against Newcastle."

"He wants to play all the time,

he's one of those characters. He made himself available but it was a few days too early for him. He has not had enough fitness but he's looking forward to it."

Sanchez has had a miserable time during his first 12 months at the club. The former Arsenal striker, who earns in excess of £350,000 (\$\$607,000) per week, has scored only one goal in 10 league games this season.

The 30-year-old became so disheartened with life under the defensive-minded Mourinho that he was considering leaving for Paris Saint-Germain this month, but Solskjaer's arrival has given everyone at United a clean slate.

Paul Pogba has benefited from the attacking philosophy that Solskjaer has installed by scoring four goals in his last two games, and the hope among the club's hierarchy is that Sanchez will also enjoy a renaissance.

"He's a player that would benefit from the interchanging, the rotation, the movement," Solskjaer



Alexis Sanchez warming up before the league match against Newcastle in October. He was out injured for the whole of last month. PHOTO: REUTERS

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Premier League games out of 99 in January that Manchester United have won – 15 more than any other team have managed.

added. "The more times you get the ball into the final third, the more chances you create, and he'll be an asset."

Given that United have scored 12 goals in three wins in Solskjaer's first three games, it seems unlikely that Sanchez will walk straight back into the side.

He is more likely to start on the bench, with Anthony Martial and Jesse Lingard continuing to support Marcus Rashford in attack.

Sanchez will also face competition from Romelu Lukaku. The Belgian, who scored only six goals in 16 league games under Mourinho, netted within two minutes after coming on as a substitute against Bournemouth on Sunday.

Praised for his attacking philosophy so far, former United striker Solskjaer insisted he is only imple-

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

YESTERDAY
Everton 0 Leicester 1
Arsenal 4 Fulham 1
Cardiff v Tottenham
Late kick-off

TODAY
Newcastle v Man United
Ch102 & Ch227, tomorrow, 4am.
Chelsea v Southampton
Ch103 & Ch228,
tomorrow, 3.35am
Wolves v Palace
Ch104 & Ch229,
tomorrow, 3.35am
West Ham v Brighton
Ch105 & Ch230,
tomorrow, 3.35am
Huddersfield v Burnley
Ch106 & Ch231,
tomorrow, 3.35am
Bournemouth v Watford
Ch107 & Ch232,
tomorrow, 3.35am

TOMORROW
Man City v Liverpool
Ch102 & Ch227, Friday, 4am

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Kante gets
the hang
of new
Blues role

LONDON • N'Golo Kante insists that he is finally growing into his new role in Chelsea's midfield as the France star prepares for today's English Premier League home clash with Southampton.

He earned a reputation as the world's best defensive midfielder after playing a key role in Chelsea and Leicester's Premier League title triumphs, as well as France's World Cup victory. But the 27-year-old has had to adapt to a change of position this season under new manager Maurizio Sarri.

Sarri, who replaced fellow Italian Antonio Conte in the close season, brought Jorginho with him from Napoli to play the pivotal midfield role in front of the defence that used to be Kante's domain.

Sarri believes Jorginho's superior passing makes him more suited to launching Chelsea's attacks than Kante, who is now operating in a slightly more advanced role on the right side of midfield.

Kante has sometimes looked out of sorts in his different position this season, but he showed signs of getting to grips with it on Sunday, scoring the winner at Crystal Palace with a well-timed run and cool finish.

"This role is something I am enjoying and in a game I try to make that run sometimes," he said.

"David (Luiz) gave me a good ball and I am happy to score with my left foot and give something to the team."

Away wins at Watford and Palace made it a happy Christmas for the Blues. But, still trailing leaders Liverpool by 11 points, their title ambitions have been put on the back-burner as they focus on securing a place in the Champions League via a top-four finish.

They could be hampered by fitness problems, with Olivier Giroud, Cesc Fabregas, Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Pedro and Callum Hudson-Odoi all doubtful.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CHELSEA V SOUTHAMPTON
Singtel TV Ch103 & StarHub Ch228, tomorrow, 3.35am

Arsenal close in on top four with 4-1 win



Arsenal midfielder Granit Xhaka stabbing the ball past Fulham goalkeeper Sergio Rico from close range to open accounts in a 4-1 English Premier League win at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. The visitors could have taken the lead in the first half but Ryan Sessegnon fluffed two gilt-edged chances. Alexandre Lacazette made it 2-0 by finishing off a superb team move in the 55th minute before Aouabakar Kamara pulled one back for Fulham in the 69th minute. Late goals from substitute Aaron Ramsey and forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang sealed the win, moving Arsenal to within two points of fourth-placed Chelsea, who host Southampton today. Earlier, Leicester striker Jamie Vardy hogged the limelight with an eye-catching somersault celebration, as his 58th-minute goal secured a 1-0 away win at Everton. "I have had it in my locker for a while," he told Sky Sports. "I saved it for a special occasion, what better one than New Year's Day. New year, new me." PHOTO: EPA-EFE



Retired American boxer Floyd Mayweather sending his Japanese kickboxing opponent Tenshin Nasukawa sprawling to the canvas during their exhibition bout in Tokyo on Monday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

MAYWEATHER'S EASY MONEY

American boxer destroys Japanese opponent in just 139 seconds to take home US\$9 million

TOKYO • Befitting his “Money” nickname, Floyd Mayweather spent his New Year’s Eve earning a quick pay cheque.

How quick? 139 seconds to be exact, in a exhibition match against Tenshin Nasukawa in Tokyo’s Saitama Super Arena on Monday.

The Japanese kickboxing sensation was knocked down three times in the first round before his corner threw in the towel.

Mayweather, 41, said on social media before the bout that he would make US\$9 million (S\$12.3 million) in Japan. In an interview after the fight, he claimed that the event was “all about entertainment”.

“We had fun,” Mayweather said of the event, according to ESPN.

“The fans in Japan, they wanted this to happen, so I said, ‘Why not?’.

“But I’m still retired. I don’t look

forward to coming back to boxing. I did it just to entertain fans in Japan.

“I’m still 50-0, and Nasukawa is still undefeated and a hell of a fighter.”

Nasukawa, just 20 years old but in possession of a 28-0 record in kickboxing and a 4-0 mark in mixed martial arts, was left in tears by the end of the bout.

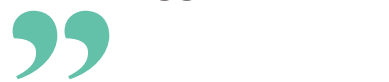
There were no official judges for the fight, which was staged under boxing-only rules that reportedly included a stipulation that Nasukawa would incur a US\$5 million penalty if he were to kick Mayweather.

The fight began after a lengthy wait for Mayweather to emerge at the arena, which led many to wonder if he would show up at all, given the uncertainty over the event.

News of it had emerged in Novem-

PICK ON SOMEONE YOUR OWN SIZE

Here is an early New Year’s resolution... To only fight experienced opponents who are my size or bigger.



MANNY PACQUIAO, boxing icon, seems to aim a dig at old rival Mayweather on Twitter.

ber, with the fight initially presented as if it were an official contest for which Mayweather would come out of retirement, much as he did in August 2017 to take on Conor McGregor.

However, Mayweather quickly said he “never agreed to an official bout” and was instead under the impression that he was going to partic-

ipate in an “exhibition” match in front of a “small group of wealthy spectators”.

He eventually confirmed that the fight would take place, telling TMZ Sports: “I’m moving around with the guy for nine minutes and, of course, it’s gonna be the highest paid exhibition ever.”

Once he entered the ring, Mayweather appeared to be taking the bout lightly, smiling at Nasukawa and flicking a few half-hearted punches. But he soon went on the attack and landed several clean, hard blows that sent Nasukawa sprawling to the canvas.

After starting his professional career at 16, Nasukawa has quickly become popular in Japan while building his undefeated record. But he has been fighting at 121 pounds (55kg), whereas Mayweather has usually fought at about 150 pounds. That size difference proved decisive.

Mayweather further highlighted what a mismatch the fight was

when he was asked how he prepared for the bout.

“Did I have a training camp for this fight? No. I went to the gym a few times,” he said.

The one-sided result sparked mixed reactions.

Filipino boxing great Manny Pacquiao appeared to take a dig at Mayweather in a tweet: “Here is an early New Year’s resolution. To continue to only fight experienced opponents who are my size or bigger.”

Pundit Kevin Iole added: “To think he deserves to be praised for pummelling a fighter who had never boxed before, and is a super bantamweight, is ridiculous.”

But former light heavyweight world champion Andre Ward defended Mayweather, saying: “Legendary fighters have been fighting exhibitions from the beginning.

“Many went on exhibition tours to stay in shape and to give fans a chance to see them in between fights. Floyd’s just doing it a different way.” WASHINGTON POST, REUTERS

Roger tops Serena in clash of titans

PERTH • Roger Federer and Serena Williams have 43 Grand Slam singles titles between them but the wifie they took yesterday was a different kind of victory for them.

Speaking together during an on-court interview after Switzerland beat the United States 2-1 in their Hopman Cup Group B match, both legends had nothing but respect and praise for each other.

“It was great fun. What a pleasure. What an honour. Thank you Serena for making it possible,” Federer said after he and Belinda Bencic defeated Williams and Frances Tiafoe 4-2, 4-3 (5-3) in the mixed doubles. “She’s a great champion,

you see how focused she is and I love that about her.”

It was the first time Federer and Williams have played against each other in careers which spanned more than 20 years. They also shared an embrace after the match.

“I was nervous about the serve. It was nerve-racking, too. I thought I had to win this point but it is Serena Williams. I made the serve and I missed the area and I want to thank you for missing the ball,” the Swiss great added.

Williams then returned the honour, saying: “He’s the greatest of all time, to be honest. It was a great experience. I’m sorry it had to finish, I



Tennis greets Serena Williams and Roger Federer taking a wifie after their Hopman Cup mixed doubles match yesterday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

was just warming up. It was such fun... I wanted to take pictures and bring my baby out.

“This guy is great, both off the court and on the court. I think his serve is super-underestimated. It’s a killer serve, you can’t read it. I

watched him all the time and I never knew how amazing it was.”

Earlier yesterday, Federer beat Tiafoe 6-4, 6-1 to put the defending champions 1-0 up, before Williams levelled for the US by defeating Bencic 4-6, 6-4, 6-3.

Meanwhile, former world No. 1 Andy Murray made a successful return to competitive tennis with a 6-3, 6-4 first-round victory over James Duckworth at the Brisbane International.

The 31-year-old ended his season early last year after suffering pain in his hip following surgery earlier that ruled him out of three of the four Grand Slam events.

“It’s not easy to sum up (but) it’s been really hard the last 18 months, been a lot of ups and downs trying to get back on court,” he said after a 10th successive win in Brisbane, having won the event at both his previous appearances in 2012 and 2013.

“Being back now I am trying to enjoy it as much as I can, for as long as I can because I am not sure how much longer I have got.” REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

HOPMAN CUP

Group A: France v Germany (9.45am), Australia v Spain (5.15pm) – Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209

Afghan chief denies abusing women

KABUL • Afghanistan’s football boss Keramuddin Karim on Monday rejected allegations he sexually and physically abused members of the women’s national team, suggesting that his accusers may have invented the claims to help their applications for asylum in Europe.

Karim has been accused of punching, raping and threatening female players, including holding a gun to one’s head, in allegations first reported by Britain’s The Guardian newspaper in November.

An investigation into the claims is ongoing but, in an interview with AFP, he was confident that his name would be cleared.

“I strongly deny these allegations,” said Karim, who has been suspended from his position as president of the Afghanistan Football Federation (AFF) pending the outcome of the investigation.

“This is a conspiracy. There has been no evidence or proof provided, only a number of unidentified voices, anonymous identities, have made the allegations.”

He said his accusers might be using the serious allegations to “seek asylum in Europe”, or they might be people who are “conspiring to defame us, hurt us in the federation”.

“They are inside and outside the

country plotting against us,” Karim said, refusing to name the people he was referring to.

He also told AFP he was cooperating with investigators from Afghanistan’s Attorney-General’s Office, which last Friday slapped a flight ban on him and four other federation officials after suspending them from their positions.

World governing body Fifa has also suspended Karim for 90 days.

He added: “I personally am not aware of such things taking place.

“As a father and a husband, I have been affected (by the claims), it has been painful.”

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL

ABL Malaysia Dragons v Saigon Heat (StarHub Ch202, 8.30pm).

FOOTBALL

English Premier League Newcastle v Man United (Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, tomorrow, 3.45am). Chelsea v Southampton (Ch103 & Ch228), Wolves v Palace (Ch104 & Ch229), West Ham v Brighton (Ch105 & Ch230), Huddersfield v Burnley (Ch106 & Ch231), Bournemouth v Watford (Ch107 & Ch232) – tomorrow, 3.35am.

TENNIS

Hopman Cup Group A: France v

Germany (9.45am), Australia v Spain (5.15pm) – Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209.

ATP Qatar Open Day 3 (StarHub Ch213, 8.30pm).

TOMORROW

BASKETBALL

ABL HK Eastern v Mono Vampire (StarHub Ch202, 8pm).

CRICKET

4th & final Test Australia v India: Day 1 (Singtel TV Ch123 & StarHub Ch236, 7.30am).

FOOTBALL

English Premier League Man City v

Liverpool (Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, Friday, 4am).

Spanish LaLiga Villarreal v Real Madrid (StarHub Ch213, Friday, 4.25am).

TENNIS

Hopman Cup Group B: Britain v United States (9.45am), Greece v Switzerland (5.15pm) – Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209.

ATP Qatar Open Day 4: Q-finals (StarHub Ch213, 8.30pm).

ATP Maharashtra Open Q-finals (Ch201, 7.30pm).

Live telecast times are subject to change. For latest updates, go to singtel.tv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

SportsWorld

Emery fined for kicking bottle at fan

LONDON • Arsenal manager Unai Emery was fined £8,000 (S\$13,845) on Monday but avoided a touchline ban for kicking a plastic bottle at a Brighton supporter, the English Football Association said.

The Spaniard immediately apologised to the fan after the incident in the closing moments of Arsenal’s 1-1 Premier League draw at the Amex Stadium last Wednesday.

He did not contest an improper conduct charge and accepted the standard penalty. REUTERS

Nasri joins West Ham until end of season

LONDON • Former French international midfielder Samir Nasri returned to football on Monday following a doping ban by joining English Premier League side West Ham.

He will reunite with West Ham manager Manuel Pellegrini, with whom he won one of his two Premier League titles at Manchester City, after joining the Hammers on an initial contract until the end of the 2018-19 season with an option to extend his stay. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Injured del Potro to skip Australian Open

BUENOS AIRES • World No. 5 Juan Martin del Potro has said on Twitter that he will miss the Australian Open starting in two weeks as he has not yet recovered from a fractured knee sustained in October.

The Argentinian added that he will announce his comeback at a later date and that “it won’t happen in Australia”.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Russia fails to submit doping data again

LONDON • Russia has missed an end-of-year deadline to turn over data on its athletes to the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada), raising the spectre of new penalties.

As a condition of lifting penalties that had largely barred Russia from hosting or participating in a host of international events, it had pledged in September to deliver to Wada data from its anti-doping laboratory. NYTIMES

Applications open for SOF scholarship

Young athletes are invited to apply for the Singapore Olympic Foundation-Peter Lim Scholarship online via www.sof.sg from today to 4pm, Jan 31.

There are four categories of varying cash amounts: Primary (\$1,000), Secondary (\$2,000), Junior College/Integrated Programme/Tertiary (\$3,000) and Under-18 High Performance (\$5,000).

Recipients have to meet criteria such as scoring consistent results in relevant sports competitions to be eligible.

SPORT

CHUN LEAVES WITH GOAL ACHIEVED

Singapore made Winter Games debut under her charge, Zhang is interim skating coach

A GREAT MENTOR

She's really knowledgeable and passionate about the sport. The things she taught me have influenced me a lot as a skater. I'm really grateful to have trained under such an exceptional athlete and coach.

CHEYENNE GOH, Singapore's first Winter Olympian in Pyeongchang last February, taking part in the 1,500m short-track speed skating event.

Nicole Chia

Four-gold Olympic champion Chun Lee-kyung has left her post as Singapore's national short-track speed skating coach.

The 42-year-old South Korean, who joined the Singapore Ice Skating Association (Sisa) in November 2015, told The Straits Times she had decided against renewing her contract with the association as both parties "could not come to an agreement on the priority and focus of the skaters, given the limited available ice time and different priorities".

Sisa president Sonja Chong added that there was an "impasse" as the association and Chun were "unable to come to mutually agreeable terms and conditions, including remuneration, job scope and key performance indicators" during contract renewal negotiations that started in September.

Chun then informed the association in November of her decision not to renew her contract.

Reflecting on her time as national coach, she said: "This was more than a job to me and I chose to do it because of my love for the sport.

"I wanted to make a difference and I am happy with how much the team has achieved, given how limited resources are for a winter sport in a tropical country.

"I have done what I needed to do to prepare and inspire the team to continue working hard as they face new challenges."

Chun's stint as national coach was highlighted by Singapore making its Winter Olympics debut, with 19-year-old Canada-based

Cheyenne Goh qualifying for the 2018 edition in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Said Chun of this milestone: "I was lucky enough to be there and that (this) goal was achieved."

She also expressed gratitude to the parents of her charges for their support, adding that it is a key reason for their successes.

The nine-gold world champion believes the Singapore team will be "even stronger than before", noting that junior skaters are setting new records and gaining more experience at the world level to raise their competitive standards ahead of this year's SEA Games in the Philippines, where winter sports will again be on the programme.

For now, Chun will focus on her family - two of her three children are studying here.

She added: "I will still be in Singapore, so if the skaters need my help or advice, I will be happy to help

them. I would like the skaters to train hard, focus on their goals and I hope they can achieve much more."

Said Goh: "I'm really fortunate to have been coached by coach Chun.

"She's really knowledgeable and passionate about the sport. The things she taught me have influenced me a lot as a skater. I'm really grateful to have trained under such an exceptional athlete and coach."

Chong said that while the association was disappointed that Chun decided not to renew her contract, it would continue to move forward with its sport and athlete development programmes.

She added: "The physical training schedule that has been established over the years will continue.

"We thank Chun for helping to reinforce a physical training foundation for our athletes.

"Moving forward, we hope that the new coach will build on it and provide athlete and coaching devel-

opment plans to ensure sustainable growth for Singapore short track."

The national team are currently led by interim coach Ann Zhang, who coached Steven Bradbury to Australia's maiden Winter Olympics gold medal at Salt Lake City in 2002.

Australian Zhang, who was head coach of Australia's short track team for 15 years, will focus on preparing the team for this weekend's SEA Open Short Track Trophy here and the Jan 25-27 ISU World Junior Short Track Championships in Canada.

Sisa is still in discussions with Zhang with regard to arrangements, and Chong added that the process of recruiting a new national coach has already started and will be done in consultation with Sport Singapore.

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Former national short-track speed skating coach Chun Lee-kyung with her charges in The Rink at JCube in March 2017. She did not renew her contract after a three-year stint as she could not come to an agreement with the association on various matters. ST FILE PHOTO

Harden vows to improve despite another triple-double

HOUSTON (Texas) • While Houston Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni and his players were in awe of James Harden's latest heroics on Monday night, the point guard merely reflected on his display and insisted that he could have done better.

Not even a 43-point triple-double to lead the Rockets to a 113-101 National Basketball Association (NBA) victory over the Memphis Grizzlies was enough for him.

"I did a poor job of controlling the

basketball, basically giving them transition points," said Harden, who had nine turnovers.

"I have to take care of the ball more, but just continue to be aggressive and make plays for my team."

The reigning Most Valuable Player added 13 assists and 10 rebounds for his fourth triple-double of the season and the 39th of his career.

His eighth straight game with at least 35 points and five assists set an NBA record - topping Oscar Robert-

son's two seven-game streaks.

He is also the first player since Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook two seasons ago to record four consecutive 40-point outings.

The Rockets, who made a sputtering start to the season, won for the 10th time in their last 11 games to improve to 21-15.

Harden has averaged 39.7 points, 6.3 rebounds, 8.5 assists and 2.1 steals during that run.

Houston are now tied with the

Los Angeles Clippers for fourth place in the Western Conference less than three weeks after they were in 14th, with Harden putting up 408 points in his past 10 games.

According to statistics provided by the Elias Sports Bureau, he has joined Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant as the only players in the past three decades to score at least 400 points over a 10-game stretch.

"What he's doing is incredible," Rockets guard Austin Rivers said.

"What he's doing is a Kobe. He's doing it so effortlessly. It's not like he's forcing it or shooting the ball every time. He's just different."

Injured teammate Chris Paul, on the sidelines for a fifth straight game, added: "It's crazy to watch the games and to witness it. What he's doing is unreal."

D'Antoni said: "I don't know how you get any better than what he's playing. He comes up with steals, triple-doubles like it's nothing."

Harden did not forget to pay tribute to his teammates.

"I'm just being aggressive. I'm just in attack mode," he said.

"But, offensively and defensively, the guys are stepping up. We've got a long way to go, but we're heading in the right direction."

Memphis (18-18) fell to their 10th loss in 15 games last month. Kyle Anderson led them with 20 points while Mike Conley added 19.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LOTTERY

TOTO

Latest results not available by press time.
Please refer to singaporepools.com or our outlets.

Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Wed, 2 Jan 2019				
A League	Newcastle Jets	Brisbane Roar	4.50pm	LW
Thu, 3 Jan 2019				
English Premier	Bournemouth	Watford	3.45am	LW*
English Premier	Chelsea	Southampton	3.45am	LW*
English Premier	Wolverhampton	Crystal Palace	3.45am	LW*
English Premier	Huddersfield	Burnley	3.45am	LW*
English Premier	West Ham	Brighton	3.45am	LW*
English Premier	Newcastle	Manchester Utd	4.00am	LW*

LW* - Telecast not available at Livewire (Singapore Pools)
Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.
LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above)
Livewire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during 'Live' telecast)
SB: Sportsbuzz@brand (21 years and above)
Singapore Pools Account Service. Call 6790 6688 for more details.

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A floorball Showdown to usher in 2019

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, who is also the adviser to Tampines grassroots organisations, sounding the horn at Our Tampines Hub on Monday for one of the matches at Showdown 2018, a one-day event organised by the Singapore Floorball Association which featured 77 teams competing in eight categories. These were Under-13 (boys and girls), U-15 (boys and girls), U-18 (boys and girls), Men's Open and Mixed Open. More than 650 players, parents and supporters competed in and watched the games before ushering in 2019 with synchronised fireworks and a laser and wave flame display at the Town Square. Local floorball vendors also showcased their latest products at the event. PHOTO: SINGAPORE FLOORBALL ASSOCIATION



life

D **ROCK REVOLUTION**
Guns N' Roses
guitarist Slash
says rock music will
make a comeback
D7



**Each day is a new day,
a new opportunity to
work towards making
your life the way
you want it.**

– Josie Cluney

Live more.
Pant less



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCKPHOTO, STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Sleeker and 5G-enabled phones

Vincent Chang

The idea that smartphones have peaked gathered steam last year among tech pundits.

The numbers support this. Global smartphone sales dipped in the last quarter of 2017, though the market returned to growth (1.8 per cent) in the first quarter of last year.

The most recent report for the third quarter of last year was similarly anaemic – sales were up just 1.4 per cent from the same quarter in 2017.

Sales are plateauing as consumers, especially those in developed markets, are not upgrading as frequently as before.

But the market slowdown appears to be forcing manufacturers to innovate out of the slump.

Take the foldable smartphone, which may actually become a thing this year. Chinese firm Royole Corporation was the first to announce such a device last year, but all eyes will be on market leader Samsung after it unveiled its own foldable prototype last November.

Besides the rumoured cost of this Samsung foldable phone (a hefty US\$1,800 or S\$2,460), there are questions about its usefulness.

“A foldable phone can indeed benefit business users and processes by arming mobile employees with a pocket device that can be converted into a larger screen for productivity purposes, in theory, at least,” says Mr Bryan Ma, vice-president of client devices at market research firm IDC.

But he feels that it “will take time for developers to write applications that dynamically adjust and take advantage of the larger screen”.

Meanwhile, manufacturers continue to reduce the borders around smartphone displays.

The latest design innovation towards this goal is the hole-punch camera display, where a hole is made near the corner of the screen to accommodate the front camera.

“This technology is complex as it involves cutting through the layers of the display and adding the camera sensor below it. It may cause light dissipation around the edges,” says Mr Parv Sharma, an analyst at Counterpoint Research.

He adds that the hole-punch display will co-exist with the notch one and make headway in the mid-range segment.



Samsung's next flagship smartphone, the Galaxy S10 series, is rumoured to have a hole-punch camera display.

Huawei and its Honor sub-brand, as well as Samsung, have already showed off smartphones with this feature last year.

Notably, Samsung's next flagship smartphone, the Galaxy S10 series, is heavily rumoured to sport a similar hole-punch camera display.

5G – fifth-generation cellular mobile networks – is also on the cards. These networks, which promise peak speeds of up to 10Gbps and low latency, are being rolled out this year in markets such as the United States. Qualcomm's latest Snapdragon 855 chipset supports a modem for 5G networks.

Mr Will Wong, IDC's research manager, says the first 5G smartphones will be introduced this year, though most countries, including

Singapore, do not have their 5G networks ready yet.

“The emergence of Chinese smartphone vendors has accelerated the market competition and stimulated the need to be the first mover in the market,” he says.

Mr Sharma expects more than 15 manufacturers to introduce 5G smartphones this year. He estimates these phones to start at around US\$800.

Apple iPhone users, though, may have to wait until 2020 for a 5G-enabled iPhone. Qualcomm and Apple have locked horns in a patent lawsuit. The latter has switched to an Intel modem for its recent iPhones.

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TECH TRENDS 2019

The Straits Times looks at what is coming your way in consumer technology in the new year

Television screen that hides itself

Television sets with roll-up displays are on the cards for TV-maker LG. The South Korean electronics giant first revealed a prototype TV with a retractable OLED screen (right) at last year's CES trade show. According to Bloomberg, this “rollable” TV will be released commercially this year.

Designing a rollable TV is a way to minimise the visual impact of TVs, which increasingly sport bigger screens, says Mr Paul Gagnon, executive director at market research firm IHS Markit. “The idea of a rollable display that can be removed from the living environment is attractive and also makes transportation of a very large display easier.”

Another example of this trend: Manufacturers such as Samsung and LG are making their TVs look like picture frames that can blend in with the surroundings or display art. This ensures that the “TV doesn't become a giant black hole on the wall when not in use”, says Mr Gagnon.

Also likely to make its entrance this year is Samsung's microLED television. Like OLED technology, the individual pixels in a microLED display emit light, which leads to better contrast and deeper blacks



than LCD technology.

The difference is that microLED displays use inorganic material (gallium nitride), which is capable of higher brightness levels than the organic material in OLED screens.

Mr Gagnon expects the market to grow slightly, with about 223 million units shipped. Almost 99 per cent of these TVs will use LCD technology while the rest will use OLED screens.

OLED TVs, despite their relatively high prices, are popular with affluent consumers – shipments are expected to grow from 2.5 million units last year to 3.4 million units worldwide this year.

Vincent Chang

[MORE STORIES on D2](#)

FROM D1

New and refreshed cameras on the cards

Trevor Tan

The camera industry has been considered a sunset one for a long time.

But it perked up last year with the launch of new full-frame mirrorless camera systems from imaging giants Canon and Nikon, the EOS R and Z6/Z7 respectively.

Further stoking excitement was the L-Mount Alliance by Leica, Panasonic and Sigma, announced at last year's Photokina, the world's biggest camera trade show. The alliance allows Panasonic and Sigma to create cameras and lenses for the Leica L-mount system.

As such, there is much excitement and anticipation for this year.

One thing is for sure – photography buffs will definitely see the launch of the Panasonic S1 and S1R full-frame mirrorless L-mount cameras. I had a brief hands-on session with a non-functioning prototype in Photokina and loved its feel and handling.

However, Olympus seems to be happy with the Micro Four Thirds format, while Fujifilm has not signalled any intention to go full-frame as it has a medium-format mirrorless camera system.

Olympus will probably launch its next flagship OM-D E-M1 Mark II successor this year. Rumours are that it will be called E-M1X and might be released as early as next month.

Fujifilm's 2017 X-T20, its mid-range APS-C mirrorless camera, is in need of a refresh and rumours are pointing to a first-quarter launch.

With 2020 an Olympic year and Tokyo being the host, Canon and Nikon will probably hold off the launch of their flagship DSLR cameras until next year.

As such, these two imaging giants are probably going to concentrate on expanding the lens line-up for their full-frame mirrorless cameras. But, hopefully, they can spring a surprise by launching a lower-end full-frame mirrorless model this year.

At the same time, there are hopes the camera industry will start to embrace computational photography, or image-capture using digital computation techniques.

Google Pixel 3's amazing Night Sight function has shown how photography can benefit when computational photography is done right. This might be the key to making cameras great again.

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Smartwatches and fitness trackers get more features

The wearable market will continue to grow as the differentiation between smartwatches and basic fitness trackers gets more blurred.

Smartwatches usually have more features such as built-in GPS, bigger touchscreens and faster performance, but they are more expensive. Fitness trackers are cheaper, but provide only basic fitness monitoring functions.

However, both categories have been upping the ante. More smartwatches are having advanced health features, for example the Apple Watch Series 4 with its ECG measurement feature, while more fitness trackers are having touchscreen displays and able to show notifications.

Mr Jitesh Ubrani, IDC's senior research analyst, says: "Many new basic wearables have features like notifications or simple app integrations

that bleed into smartwatch territory. As more features get added and the price difference between basic trackers and smartwatches narrows, brands could potentially move consumers upstream to smartwatches."

According to IDC, the Apple Watch will continue to dominate the smartwatch category over the next few years. Apple led the market last year with a 47 per cent forecasted share. While this is expected to decline to 36.2 per cent by 2022, it will continue to be the market leader.

For now, the smartwatch market is bolstered by the relatively stable and higher average selling price of the Apple Watch, says Mr Alan Antin, senior director at research firm Gartner. But the overall average selling price of smartwatches is expected to decline due to lower-priced competitors and higher volumes.

The worldwide shipments of wearable devices will reach 225 million this year, an increase of 25.8 per cent from last year, says Gartner.

Technology brands such as Apple, Fitbit and Samsung have a comfortable lead in the smartwatch market, but traditional watch brands will catch up.

Mr Antin says: "Traditional watch brands such as Fossil and Casio will gain market share by offering more style and choice in their portfolio than the technology brands."

Montblanc unveiled the superb Summit 2 smartwatch last year, while Casio's Wear OS smartwatch WSD-F30 will launch this month. Fans can look forward to more such smartwatches from traditional and luxury watch brands this year.

Trevor Tan

Apple's chief operating officer Jeff Williams at a presentation of the new smartwatch Apple Watch Series in California in September last year.

ST PHOTO: TREVOR TAN

Innovative designs for PCs

Computers, unlike smartphones, have long reached maturity, with changes to PC designs and features often being incremental.

But PC vendors continue to experiment with new form factors.

Notable recent examples include HP's leather-bound Spectre Folio convertible and Lenovo's dual-screen Yoga Book.

In fact, Ms Mikako Kitagawa, senior principal analyst at market research firm Gartner, says more vendors may take a page from the Yoga Book, which comes with two displays – an E Ink screen and a standard touchscreen – and come up with their own versions.

Change is also brewing in computers. Over a year ago, Qualcomm revealed its plans to compete with Intel in the PC segment with a Windows 10 laptop powered by a Qualcomm chip.

The firm stepped up its efforts last month with the Snapdragon 8cx platform, which promises constant connectivity, including 5G support, as well as long battery life.

Qualcomm says these devices will be launched in the third quarter of this year.

In the first half of last year, the PC market appeared to be in its best shape in years. Global PC shipments managed a slight uptick (2.7 per cent) in the second quarter of 2018 – the first time in six years – according to Gartner.

But the market stayed flat in the third quarter and it is unlikely the fourth quarter of last year will show an improvement because of the ongoing shortage of Intel processors, which power most computers.

Intel's main rival AMD has been re-energised in recent years and has a good product in its Ryzen processor.

But PC vendors, especially notebook vendors, cannot easily switch chip suppliers at short notice to alleviate Intel's processor shortfall.

Ms Kitagawa expects the processor shortage to ease later this year. She does not believe the current shortage will have a lasting impact on demand, as this is being driven by businesses upgrading to Windows 10.

Overall, she expects worldwide PC shipments to increase slightly this year compared with last year.

Vincent Chang

Photos

Pricey gimbal camera worth the splurge

Trevor Tan

The DJI Osmo Pocket camera, as its name implies, is meant to fit into your pocket.

It measures 121.9 x 28.6 x 36.9mm and looks more handle than camera. But its tiny camera, which sits on a mechanical gimbal at one end, is a capable unit that takes 12-megapixel photos and records 4K videos at up to 60 frames per second (fps).

DJI has also squeezed a 1-inch touchscreen display into the handle that you swipe up and down to control the gimbal.

Below the display are two buttons for power and shutter release, with the latter indicated by a red dot.

Between the display and the two buttons is a removable plastic tab that hides the Universal port. You can slide the included USB-C adaptor or Lightning adaptor into this Universal port to connect the Pocket to an Android smartphone or iPhone.

On one side of the handle is a microSD card slot. At the bottom is a USB-C port for charging. There is no tripod mount. You will need to fork out extra moolah to get the Pocket's extension rod, which comes with a tripod mount.

You might also want to get the Pocket's waterproof case, as the Pocket is not water-resistant. The case lets you use the camera underwater to a depth of 60m. But both accessories are not yet available.

You can use the Pocket without a smartphone, but it works best with one, using the DJI Mimo app. Not only do you have a bigger display as a viewfinder, but the app also has an intuitive interface that makes changing settings and switching through the different modes a breeze.

If not, you need to remember which way to swipe on its small display for the different functions. Swipe down for Settings and swipe up for functions such as Recentre, Selfie and Follow.

Swipe right to browse through recorded videos and still images. Swipe left to bring up the various modes available. There are times



Pair the DJI Osmo Pocket camera with a smartphone so that you have a bigger display as a viewfinder.

THE STRAITS TIMES TECH EDITOR'S CHOICE

when I cannot remember which way to swipe to get the functions I want.

Like other Osmo models, the Pocket has the Panorama, Slow Motion, Time-lapse and Motion Time-lapse modes.

My favourite mode is Motion Time-lapse, which lets one create beautifully panned time-lapse videos that look professionally done. You just need to select a scene, then move the camera to another scene – you can have up to four scenes – and start recording. Easy.

There are two other nifty features – ActiveTrack and FaceTrack.

With ActiveTrack, just drag a rectangle on the Mimo app to select the subject and the Pocket will track it accordingly. With FaceTrack, the camera will automatically recognise a human face and lock it in the centre of the frame. It works great in my selfie video tests, locking onto my face as I walk.

The 4K videos I record with the Pocket are sharp and detailed. Unless you are using the camera while running madly, the videos you shoot – whether you are walking or jogging – will look like they were shot using a camera dolly.

Even without an external microphone, the Pocket captures my voice clearly in breezy conditions.

Despite its small image sensor, the still images are surprisingly sharp. Even images that are shot at night do not exhibit too much noise artefacts.

On the downside, the camera has a fixed focal length of only 26mm, with 80 degrees field-of-view. It is not really wide enough for selfie videos. You need the extension rod to get a wider angle.

Battery life is rated 140 minutes for full HD video recording at 30fps. In my tests, the battery level dropped to 60 per cent with around 30 minutes of 4K video recording at 30fps.

● **Verdict:** The DJI Osmo Pocket might be a tad expensive at more than \$500, but it is a fantastically portable gimbal camera that is capable of great steady videos and stills.

SPECS

PRICE: \$519
IMAGE SENSOR: 12-megapixel
1/2.3-inch
DISPLAY: 1-inch touchscreen
LENS: 26mm f/2.0
SENSITIVITY: ISO 100 to 3,200
CONNECTIVITY: Bluetooth, Wi-Fi
WEIGHT: 116g

RATING

FEATURES: 4/5
DESIGN: 5/5
PERFORMANCE: 4/5
BATTERY LIFE: 3/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 4/5
OVERALL: 4/5

**THE STRAITS TIMES
SINGAPOREAN
OF THE YEAR 2018**

PRESENTED BY **UBS**

The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year award, organised in partnership with UBS for the fourth year running, seeks to honour the positive impact made by Singaporeans and celebrate the triumph of the human spirit

Douglas Yeo and Poh Kok Wee
Veteran diver Douglas Yeo, 50, risked his life to help with the evacuation of the last five Thai boys who were trapped in a cave. Age also did not deter Poh Kok Wee, 57, from helping scout for alternative cave entrances to reach the boys.

FINALIST

Read about the other finalists at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the Singaporean of the Year 2018 by Jan 15, 6pm

Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

Terms and conditions apply

PC

Handsome, well-built ultrabook

Razer’s new Stealth ultrabook boasts excellent build quality and a flashy keyboard

Vincent Chang

Razer has overhauled its Stealth ultrabook. Its design is now similar to the Razer Blade gaming laptop, though the Stealth – with its 13-inch display – is more portable than the 15.6-inch Blade.

It comes with slimmer bezels that measure just 4.9mm thick at the sides, though the bottom bezel is still fairly chunky.

Razer has also toned down its logo. The flashy backlit version on the lid has been replaced by a plain, colourless one. It makes the Stealth appear more professional, more grown-up if you will.

Thanks to the narrow bezels, it is more compact. But it is actually a tad thicker than the previous version. Its 1.3kg weight, though, is typical of a modern ultrabook.

The extra bulk is perhaps due to its new GeForce MX150 graphics chip. While it is an entry-level model, it has more graphical horsepower than laptops with the usual integrated graphics solution from Intel. Users should have no issues running popular game titles such as Overwatch or Fortnite, especially at a lower resolution.

And if you need a more capable graphics chip, the Stealth comes with a Thunderbolt 3 port to connect to an external graphics card enclosure, such as the Razer Core. This enclosure can host a high-end desktop-class graphics card to provide the 3-D gaming performance required for more graphically intensive games.

The Stealth ultrabook’s screen displays rich colours. PHOTO: RAZER



Clad in black anodised aluminium, the Stealth is sturdy and barely yields under pressure.

It looks handsome, until you put your hands on it. It smudges so easily that it is covered with fingerprints and other grease marks within minutes of handling it.

Thankfully, the keys are less susceptible to grease than the rest of the laptop. They offer decent tactile feedback, though they are shallow with little travel. The keyboard feels sturdy with barely any flex.

However, it does feel slightly cramped because of the speakers at the sides. Some keys, such as the Backspace, are shorter than usual.

The speakers are decent, though

they can sound strained when set to the maximum volume.

As expected of a Razer laptop, it comes with Razer’s Chroma keyboard backlight feature. Each key can be individually configured to display your preferred hue using the preloaded Razer Synapse software.

It has an enormous touchpad that takes up the entire height of the palm rest, reminiscent of those on Apple laptops. It feels silky smooth, thanks to its glass surface.

Razer says the Stealth’s display supports 100 per cent of the sRGB colour space and comes calibrated out of the box.

It certainly looks very nice to me. The colourful wallpaper that was set as the default on my review set

shows off the screen’s rich colours. Viewing angles are very wide with minimal colour shift. There is also barely any reflection because of its matte nature.

Battery life is excellent, with the Stealth lasting eight hours in the video-loop battery test with the screen brightness set to maximum.

The only downside is its price, which, at almost \$2,500, puts it in the premium category. But to some users, its build quality, excellent display and flashy keyboard may be worth it.

• **Verdict: An ultrabook that offers a dash of gaming, excellent display and lots of battery life.**

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THE STRAITS TIMES
TECH
EDITOR’S CHOICE

SPECS
PRICE: \$2,479.90
PROCESSOR: Intel Core i7-8565U (1.8GHz)
GRAPHICS: Nvidia GeForce MX150 4GB GDDR5
RAM: 16GB
SCREEN SIZE: 13.3 inches, 1,920 x 1,080 pixels
CONNECTIVITY: Thunderbolt 3 port, USB 3.1 Gen 2 Type-C, 2 x USB 3.1 Type-A, audio jack
BATTERY: 53.1 watt-hour
RATING
FEATURES: 4/5
DESIGN: 5/5
PERFORMANCE: 4/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 2/5
BATTERY LIFE: 5/5
OVERALL: 4.5/5

Bold and luxurious convertible

Vincent Chang

The first thing that hit me about the HP Spectre Folio is the smell. Not the usual odour of new electronics, but the musky whiff of leather, like the interior of a new car.

The scent rolls off the Folio’s leather-clad body, which is not, like one would expect, clad in a leather case. Rather, this new HP convertible laptop and its genuine leather cover are inseparable.

It definitely turns heads and is a great accessory for a high-level executive.

But while luxurious, the leather exterior is not what makes the Folio different from other hybrid computers that switch between laptop and tablet forms.

Its trick is a hidden kickstand behind the display that lets you move the screen forward, from its default clamshell laptop mode until it comes to rest at an angle just above the touchpad.

Magnets hold the screen in this position, which is great for watching videos, playing games or when you do not need the keyboard.

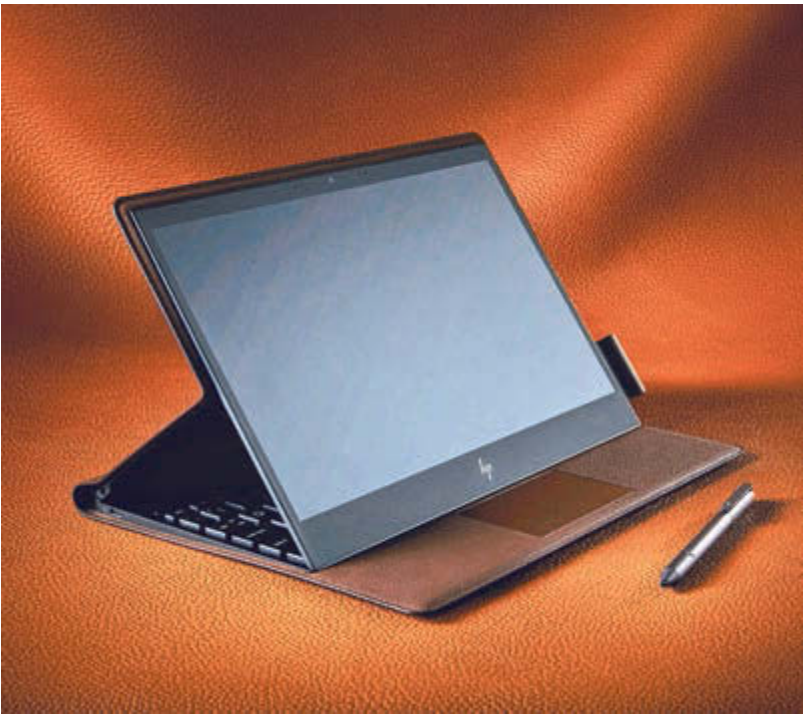
The kickstand can be folded further – leaving the back of the display to rest on the keyboard and the touchpad – to achieve a tablet form.

A stylus is bundled, but the leather loop to hold it is attached to the Folio with sticky tape. It feels like a cheap, ad-hoc solution and I am not convinced that the tape will maintain its stickiness over time.

The Folio is slightly heavier than its slim form would suggest, clocking in at around 1.5kg, which is average for a hybrid laptop with a 13-inch screen.

To keep it slim, HP has outfitted it with thin Thunderbolt 3 and USB Type-C ports, all of which can be used to charge the device. A dongle with an HDMI output, a USB Type-A port and a USB Type-C port is included.

The leather body does pose some potential issues. I am not sure how its pristine looks will survive a year of usage, or how it would cope with accidental liquid spills.



The screen of the HP Spectre Folio can be positioned at an angle just above the touchpad. PHOTO: HP

The Folio feels only slightly warm after extended use. Perhaps it has to do with the leather, which is a worse conductor of heat than a metal chassis. Or it could be because of the Folio’s processor, which is a low-power variant that draws just 5W of power compared with 15W for the usual Intel notebook processor.

In fact, the Intel processor in the Folio does not require a cooling fan and runs silently. The downside is that this processor, denoted by its “Y” suffix, is not as powerful as the standard laptop chip (with the “U” suffix).

The benchmark results confirm this. In the PCMark 10 benchmark which assesses a computer’s general system performance, the Folio scores 2,944 points, which is significantly lower than the average 3,500 points achieved by other laptops.

To be fair, I find the Folio to run sufficiently fast for basic computing tasks such as Web browsing and text editing. It is probably not the most suitable device for crunching large Excel spreadsheets.

But it has incredible battery stamina when it comes to video playback. It lasted 13hr5min in the video-loop battery test while running a video at maximum brightness.

• **Verdict: A luxurious and unique convertible that offers incredible battery life and decent performance.**

THE STRAITS TIMES
TECH
EDITOR’S CHOICE

SPECS
PRICE: \$2,299
PROCESSOR: Intel Core i5-8200Y (1.3GHz)
GRAPHICS: Intel UHD Graphics 615
RAM: 8GB
SCREEN SIZE: 13.3 inches, 1,920 x 1,080 pixels
CONNECTIVITY: 2 x Thunderbolt 3 ports, USB 3.1 Gen 1 Type-C, audio jack
BATTERY: 54 watt-hour
RATING
FEATURES: 4/5
DESIGN: 5/5
PERFORMANCE: 3/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 3/5
BATTERY LIFE: 5/5
OVERALL: 4.5/5

Brimming with high-end features

Vincent Chang

Netgear has included everything but the kitchen sink in its latest high-end Wi-Fi router, the Pro Gaming XR700.

Its hardware specifications are impressive and I was suitably awed by the size of this router, which weighs almost 2kg.

It comes with six Gigabit LAN ports, along with a 10 Gigabit SFP+ port that connects to compatible devices – typically a network switch – for speeds of up to 10Gbps.

Two of its Gigabit ports (ports 1 and 2) can also be aggregated to allow for download speeds of up to 2Gbps for a single device.

In addition to the prevailing 802.11ac Wi-Fi standard, the XR700 supports the short-range but high-speed 802.11ad standard. This 60GHz wireless standard is used in a handful of wireless docks and is of limited use to most consumers.

But I feel consumers would benefit more from having an extra 5GHz 802.11ac wireless band (it has two bands, 2.4GHz and 5GHz) instead of the niche 802.11ad protocol.

Those who have amassed a sizeable collection of media may love the XR700’s ability to function as a Plex media server to stream music, photos and videos to other devices in the home network. It saves them the hassle of repurposing an old PC or using their main computer for this.

Another useful feature: The router can be configured to automatically back up content from an attached USB storage drive to Amazon Drive cloud storage.

It is well-built with sturdy adjustable antennas. Its top panel is partly meshed for better ventilation – I glimpsed a cooling fan inside the router, though it appeared to be inactive during my testing.

It runs DumaOS, a router software developed by British firm Netduma. It is the same software used in the Netgear XR500, an earlier and slightly watered-down version of the XR700.

DumaOS looks much prettier than Netgear’s usual router interface. It has nice visualisations for key information such as the net-



The Pro Gaming XR700 allows users to search and add game servers. PHOTO: NETGEAR

work traffic and CPU usage. Connected clients appear as nodes in a network map. More importantly, there are extensive settings to tweak the router, each with its own explanatory notes for the less tech-savvy user.

It is clearly built for online gamers. A Geo-Filter feature lets gamers search and add game servers that are within user-defined geographical limits. A server closer to home will have lower latency and feel more responsive than a distant server.

It also has a Quality of Service (QoS) feature that lets users allocate a specific amount of bandwidth for their gaming devices.

Those who have a VPN (virtual private network) for specific uses, such as gaming, can also choose to apply the VPN for only specific devices and specific online services through the router. This is handy because the VPN may not be suited for all types of use cases and could be slower than a standard connection.

It clocks an average peak speed of 580Mbps in the speed test. This drops to around 160Mbps in a bedroom that is some distance from the router’s location in the living room.

While the XR700 comes with plenty of features, it does have a major omission – support for the Wi-Fi 6 standard (802.11ax) introduced late last year.

To be fair, there are no client devices that can support Wi-Fi 6 now, though this is likely to change in the coming months.

• **Verdict: Its \$859 price tag is hard to justify for all but the most hardcore tech-savvy user. The cheaper XR500 (\$439) may be a better choice as it has similar gaming features, but not the XR700’s costly and niche extras.**

SPECS
PRICE: \$859
ETHERNET INTERFACE: 1 x 10/100/1000 Gigabit WAN, 6 x 10/100/1000 Gigabit LAN, 10 Gigabit LAN SFP+ port
STANDARDS: 802.11a/b/g/n/ac/ad
SECURITY: WPA2
ADVANCED FIREWALL
FEATURES: NAT, DoS and SPI
RATING
FEATURES: 5/5
DESIGN: 4/5
PERFORMANCE: 4/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 2/5
OVERALL: 4/5

Gaming

Super fun

The Super Smash Bros Ultimate is an all-star crossover game that is suitable for newbies and veteran gamers

Lester Hio

Super Smash Bros Ultimate lives up to its title – the fifth instalment of the fighting game series which pulls together classic characters from the history of gaming into a giant crossover battle, is fresh, nostalgic and a blast to play with friends.

In the Super Smash Bros series, the Pokemon Pikachu can blast lightning at hero-plumber Mario, while trying to avoid fireballs shot by Ryu from Street Fighter, with the round, pink, adorable Kirby watching from the sidelines.

Ultimate is the biggest and most ambitious version yet. A Nintendo Switch exclusive, it has the most number of fighters in the series with 74 playable characters, and Nintendo fans will have no shortage of favourites to pick from.

The character roster reads like a Hall of Fame of famous gaming characters, including names like Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Solid Snake, Pokemon Trainer and Sonic the Hedgehog. Ultimate has also answered the prayers of long-time Nintendo fans with the addition of classic characters from enduring franchises, such as Simon Belmont from the Castlevania series, King K. Rool from Donkey Kong and Ridley from Metroid.

As a long-time Legend Of Zelda fan, I immediately gravitated towards Link, the pointy-eared protagonist of the series, who packs an arsenal of weapons like a sword, bombs, bow and arrow, and a boomerang. But I found myself unable to choose a favourite character to stick with as I had so many other favourites and ended up cycling through different fighters after



THE STRAITS TIMES TECH EDITOR'S CHOICE

each match, from Pikachu to Bayonetta to Cloud from Final Fantasy.

Everything about the game looks and feels highly polished and refined. The game's graphics are stellar, with each character's animation looking smooth and unique. Each attack, hit and strike has a satisfying crunch. When each character busts out his final smashes – his most powerful move, which builds up as he fights – the animation ranges from the awesome to the ridiculous, but they are always satisfying to pull off.

Ultimate lets you customise how to win matches, with the default being knocking – or smashing – your opponent off stage after weakening them. Other options include reducing your opponent's stamina to zero, like a traditional fighting game, or being the last man standing in a group match.

Matches play out in one of the game's 103 stages, which come from existing games, such as Green Hill Zone from the Sonic game series or the Pokemon Stadium from

the Pokemon franchise. Each stage is unique with its own hazards, with some stages requiring you to keep on your toes or risk falling off.

The best part of Ultimate, as with any Smash game, is playing with friends. While fighting games can often be daunting to newcomers, as there can be a steep, technical learning curve, Nintendo has perfected the balance between accessibility and longevity in Ultimate.

Newcomers can jump in with their favourite character and learn the basics relatively quickly and have a good time after a few rounds, while competitive players have a host of technical skills to master. There is something for everyone, casual or competitive alike, as underneath the novelty and fun of this all-star crossover lies a game with a host of advanced tactics.

Ultimate supports up to eight players on a single screen. The more players you have, the more chaotic and fun it is. There is nothing like hosting an all-out free-for-all with eight players, as the screen lights up with a variety of explosions, sword hits, punches to the face and laser beams being fired. I found that four players is the sweet spot between having enough mayhem and still being able to keep track of where your character is while being alert of your opponent's movements.

Ultimate brings a host of customisation options to suit any party crowd, such as player handicaps to offset any skill disadvantage between experienced and new players, or increasing the chaos and fun of matches by making random items appear more often.

There is also the option for online multiplayer. It is, however, a step back from the online capabilities of the previous Smash game for the Nintendo Wii U, as there is now no separate options for competitive or casual play. This can be a pain if you are a casual player who ends up in a competitive setting, but can be avoided somewhat by specifying exactly what kind of game restrictions you want.

Those who want to play Ultimate solo will find the single-player mode, World of Light, a sufficient distraction for at least 20 hours, more if you are aiming for full completion. You start with only one playable character, Kirby, and have to fight battles across a giant game board to unlock other playable characters and Spirits.

Spirits make your chosen character stronger, and are themselves recognisable side characters from other video-game series. There are over a thousand Spirits to collect, which will prove to be quite the time sink for the dedicated player.

Ultimate is simply pure fun to

pick up, be it putting in several hours in single-player mode or having a quick round or two with a few friends. The beauty of Ultimate on the Nintendo Switch means that it can be played anywhere, letting you squeeze in a match while waiting for the bus or challenge friends during lunch.

• **Verdict: Super Smash Bros Ultimate is the finest addition to the franchise yet, with a dizzying array of fan favourite characters to choose from and game modes perfect for multiplayer game nights. Ultimate is a love letter to the history of gaming and promises fun for whoever picks it up.**

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• Lester Hio is a freelance writer.

SPECS

PRICE: \$84.90 (Nintendo Switch)
GENRE: Fighting

RATING

9/10

The Super Smash Bros Ultimate has 74 playable characters, the most number of fighters in the series.

Lots of gameplay creativity

Mohd Nizam

When Just Cause 3 was released in 2015, I had thought it was the conclusion to a trilogy. So it was a pleasant surprise to see Just Cause 4 unveiled earlier last year.

For a start, logging into publisher Square Enix's account in the game's menu is easier. Continuing from the story in Just Cause 3, you play as protagonist Rico Rodriguez, who now finds himself in a fictional South American location known as Solis.

Solis comprises four biomes, each with much terrain and wildlife to discover. It also packs more weather effects such as sandstorms, tornadoes and lightning that players will have to navigate around.

In his quest to find answers to questions about his father, Rico joins forces with other characters to build a resistance force against Black Hand, a private army linked to the dictators from his past encounters.

The usual arsenal of tools and weapons is available from the beginning. A grappling hook lets Rico pull himself ahead and towards either a person, vehicle or platform that is within range. Combine that with a parachute and he can lunge skywards and float over a large area. For traversing longer distances, he can switch to his wingsuit. Rico can pick and carry two types of weapons from a wide selection of choices, although the dual-wielding pistols and sticky C4 explosives from the last game are missing from this one.

To progress, Rico allies with three key figures and helps them with



their pursuits. With Nick, a local soldier, he takes on rescue missions to free civilians and recruit them as freedom fighters. With Garland, a stunt movie producer, he attempts to complete various stunts with specific requirements to score booster upgrades. With Javi, an archaeologist, he helps to uncover secrets within tombs to earn upgrades for tools.

Completing these objectives unlocks resources to expand the frontline of Rico's influence, one territory at a time. There are over 1,000 sq m of land waiting to be liberated.

With High Dynamic settings, the game projects beautiful and photorealistic backdrops even on a non-PS4 Pro console. Be sure to get the latest update patch online that addresses the known graphical and stability issues.

Another key upgrade in Just Cause 4 is with the grappling hook. Apart from being able to tether two items together, the grappling hook can be attached to air balloons and rocket boosters, with three degrees of intensity – low, medium and high. By combining different intensity settings, you get myriad possibilities, such as the ability to create a modified transport or cause major disruptions when facing hostile threats.

Anytime you wish to take a break from all the madness, just hop on any vehicle and tune in to one of the in-game radio stations. Some of the

chatter from the radio stations are quite hilarious.

But despite the new features, I cannot help feeling that Just Cause 4 has fallen a little short in terms of meeting its potential. This is because given all the insane enhancements you can conjure up, there is no opportunity to share them with friends over a multiplayer setting. The only way is to capture it on video and share it online. I hope the next release will see a multiplayer feature.

• **Verdict: Just Cause 4 retains the franchise's identity and offers oodles of gameplay creativity with an enhanced grappling hook, fancy tools and a massive playground.**

• Mohd Nizam is a freelance writer.

SPECS

PRICE: From \$69.90 (PC, Xbox One, PS4, version tested)
GENRE: Action adventure

RATING

7/10

Superb audio, powerful force feedback

Trevor Tan

Razer's Nari Ultimate is the gaming company's latest flagship wireless gaming headset with its haptic technology HyperSense.

Razer developed this technology in partnership with Lofelt, a German engineering firm that specialises in creating haptic technologies. HyperSense works by converting audio signals into tactile feedback in real time and works out-of-the-box on various platforms from PC to PlayStation.

You can think of Nari Ultimate as a wireless gaming headset with force feedback. It also comes with THX Spatial Audio that simulates 360-degree sound for greater awareness during gameplay.

Looks-wise, the all-black headset combines the aesthetics of three other Razer gaming headsets. It has the dual metal strip auto-adjusting headband design of Razer Thresher, the ear cups of Razer Kraken and the on-ear controls of Razer Man O' War. Razer's Chroma lighting illuminates the Razer logo of both ear cups.

The headband fits my head well, while the swivelling ear cups are big enough to totally cover my ears. However, my ears got a tad warm after only 30 minutes of gaming and I had to remove the headset to give my ears a breather.

At the bottom of the left ear cup are the power button, 3.5mm audio jack, micro-USB charging port, chat volume dial, microphone mute button and built-in retractable microphone.

One nice touch is the red ring light on the tip of the retractable microphone that lights up when you press the microphone mute button. A glance at the microphone and you will know whether it has been muted.

At the bottom of the right ear cup is the volume dial. The 2.4GHz USB wireless transceiver is also stowed there. Just press on it to eject it from the ear cup.

Plug the USB wireless transceiver to your PC, turn on the headset and it is ready to rumble.



The Razer Nari Ultimate is one of very few force-feedback gaming headsets in the market.

THE STRAITS TIMES TECH EDITOR'S CHOICE

The force feedback feels great in relation to the gameplay. Playing the Diablo III action role-playing game, every swing of the sword is met with vibrant haptic responses on the ear cups. If you play first-person shooters, you will be able to tell where the bullets are coming from as you can sense the vibrations moving from one ear cup to the other. Also, if the fighting becomes intense, so will the vibration levels. Another plus point is the tremendous bass response, which does not obscure voices and music.

The Nari Ultimate will work as a normal headset when you connect it to your smartphone or Nintendo Switch using the audio jack. And while the headset works wirelessly with the PlayStation 4 (Xbox One not supported), the best experience is still with the PC as there are more configuration settings available via the Razer Synapse software. Apart from changing the colour of the Razer logo, you can set the haptic intensity, surround sound settings and bass boost level using Synapse.

You can see the headset's battery level with Synapse. In my tests with the Chroma lighting and HyperSense turned on and connected to my gaming PC wirelessly, the bat-

tery level dropped to 50 per cent after around three hours of use.

The biggest downside of the Nari Ultimate is its price tag. At more than \$300, it is a hefty investment for any gamer. That said, there are very few force-feedback gaming headsets in the market.

• **Verdict: It might not be the first-ever force-feedback gaming headset, but the Razer Nari Ultimate's combination of superb audio and great haptic response will add that extra delight during gaming.**

SPECS

PRICE: \$309.90
DRIVERS: 50mm neodymium
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 20Hz to 20,000Hz
CONNECTIVITY: 2.4GHz, 3.5mm jack
WEIGHT: 431g

RATING

FEATURES: 4/5
DESIGN: 4/5
PERFORMANCE: 4/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 4/5
OVERALL: 4/5

Commentary

Social media: what's in a 'like'

How one uses platforms such as Instagram and Facebook will determine whether they are harmful or not



Trevor Tan

One of my favourite Netflix original shows, Aggretsuko, recently had a Christmas special. For the uninitiated, Aggretsuko is a Japanese anime about a red panda character called Retsuko from Hello Kitty creator Sanrio. Working in the accounting department of a trading firm and being constantly frustrated by bad bosses and irritating colleagues, the

socially awkward Retsuko sings death metal in a karaoke bar every day to vent. In this “We Wish You A Metal Christmas” special that picks up from where the first season ended, our anti-heroine got hooked on Instagram as she tries to get the attention and validation which she can’t get in her real life. Retsuko would overpay at restaurants for mediocre-tasting but great-looking meals. She plans her trips around places to get a better chance of that Instagram-worthy photo – just so she can get more “likes” for her posts. This got me thinking about how Instagram has changed our lives. When it started in 2010, its premise was simple – share photos or videos with friends. To “like” a photo, just tap on it. But as Instagram became more popular (it reached a billion users last year), celebrities, brands and influencers started jumping on the pictorial bandwagon. The global Instagram influencer market is estimated to reach a value of more than US\$2 billion (S\$2.74 billion) this year, according to

media marketing agency Mediakix. However, as with other social media apps, Instagram can have a negative effect on users. A study in 2017 by the Royal Society for Public Health in Britain, in which 1,400 people aged between 14 and 24 were asked to rank the positive and negative effects of the big five social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube), Instagram was ranked last overall, having the most negative effect in terms of sleep, body image and the fear of missing out on what others are enjoying. Ms Bailey Richardson, one of the original 13 employees of Instagram, quit the app last September. In an interview with The Washington Post, she said “the sense of intimacy, artistry and discovery that defined early Instagram and led to its success has given way to a celebrity-driven marketplace that is engineered to sap users’ time and attention at the cost of their well-being”. But while it is easy to point the finger at the social media apps and platforms, I feel that Instagram, like any other medium, is not entirely to blame for its users’ problems.

It is how users utilise Instagram that is the root of the problem. For instance, if you follow the accounts of supermodels with perfect bodies, you are more likely to develop self-esteem or body image issues. If you follow those of influencers who seem to be living the high life, you are surely not going to be happy with your life. I feel it is ultimately one’s choices that dictate whether an app or social media platform proves to be harmful or not. On my personal Instagram account, I follow mostly friends, some celebrities, a few watch brands and plenty of corgis and cats. This way, I can always see cute dogs or cats to brighten my day when looking through my Instagram feed. I have also become more discerning when it comes to posting photos and won’t go to great lengths to take an Instagram-worthy photo to show others the life that I don’t lead. So, don’t be like Retsuko. Be yourself instead of being someone else.

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Phones

Budget smartphone with good battery life

Vincent Chang

The Asus ZenFone Max Pro M2 has a tough act to follow. The previous model, the ZenFone Max Pro M1, was a huge hit in India last year, with sales of more than one million units in less than six months. Unsurprisingly, Asus has not changed the M1’s winning formula. The M2 retains its predecessor’s key selling points – a massive 5,000mAh battery, stock Android interface and competitive pricing (\$349). The most obvious change is its physical appearance. Gone is the M1’s bland metal backing. The M2 has a glossy and reflective plastic backing that could easily be mistaken for glass. This glass-like backing makes the phone look more premium, but it is susceptible to fingerprints and other smudges. Switching to a plastic body has helped Asus reduce the M1’s hefty 180g weight by a fraction. But the new model – at 175g – is still heavier than the average smartphone because of its large battery. The display has also been tweaked. Like many recent smartphones, its screen has narrow bezels with a small notch to accommodate the front camera. There is no option in the settings to hide the notch. It is a decent IPS LCD screen with good viewing angles, though I had problems using the screen under the sun because it is not bright enough. A useful and surprising addition (for a budget device) to the M2 is near field communication (NFC), which is required for mobile payments. Besides the display and the backing, the M2 is physically similar to the previous version. Even the location of the ports (it has a 3.5mm audio jack and a micro-USB port), the power and volume buttons, as well as the SIM slot, remain identical to the M1. It has a rear fingerprint sensor. Compared with more expensive smartphones, the M2 is a fraction slower at detecting my finger and unlocking the phone. But it is still faster than its face-unlock feature, which is sluggish and occasionally requires a few attempts to work.

Because I have multiple USB-C devices, it would have been convenient if the M2 uses a USB-C port for charging instead of the old-school micro-USB port. The bigger issue here, though, is its slow charging speed (about three hours for a full charge) given its large battery. Another sign of its budget origin – the M2, like the previous model, supports only the older and slower 802.11n standard, not the prevailing 802.11ac protocol. It should not matter for most users unless they often download large files. Even affordable smartphones have dual cameras and the M2 is no different – with a secondary depth-sensing camera to enable bokeh, or out-of-focus effect. The amount of background blur can be adjusted before taking the photo, using the camera app. This app is clunky and it would sometimes take too long to process the photo. Asus says the M2 uses artificial intelligence to detect scenes such as greenery and food and adjusts the camera accordingly, but this feature does not seem to be available yet. Photos taken in bright daylight turn out sharp with good colour accuracy. The results are less impressive at night, with plenty of noise and blown-out highlights even when using its night mode. It is powered by a Qualcomm Snapdragon 660 chip, which is faster than the M1’s Snapdragon 636 chip. This mid-range processor runs the game, PUBG Mobile, smoothly at medium graphics settings. The phone also does not feel overly warm after a gaming session. Its stock Android 8.1 interface is clean and feels responsive, aided by 6GB of RAM. It does have a few third-party apps, such as Facebook and Instagram, that cannot be entirely removed. Thanks to its large battery, the M2 can go almost two days without charging. It would end up with about 55 per cent of battery life at the end of a day. In The Straits Times’ video-loop battery test, it lasted 10 hours and 50 minutes.

• **Verdict:** An affordable mid-range smartphone that offers excellent battery stamina and decent performance.



The Asus ZenFone Max Pro M2 can function almost two days on a single charge due to its large battery.

SPECS

PRICE: \$349
PROCESSOR: Qualcomm Snapdragon 660 (Quad-core 2.2GHz, quad-core 1.8GHz)
DISPLAY: 6.26-inch, LCD, 2,280 x 1,080 pixels, 403 ppi pixel density
OPERATING SYSTEM: Android 8.1
MEMORY: 64GB (microSD expandable to 2TB), 6GB RAM
REAR CAMERAS: 12MP (f/1.8) and 5MP (f/2.4)
FRONT CAMERA: 13MP (f/2.0)
BATTERY: Non-removable 5,000mAh battery

RATING

FEATURES: 3/5
DESIGN: 4/5
PERFORMANCE: 4/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 5/5
BATTERY LIFE: 5/5
OVERALL: 4/5

New Products

Arlo Ultra

HOME SECURITY CAMERA

Price to be confirmed, available first quarter of this year

The Arlo Ultra home security camera system consists of a 4K security camera with a 180-degree field of view and an integrated spotlight, as well as a SmartHub that connects to the user’s router to provide extended Wi-Fi range for Arlo cameras. The package includes a one-year subscription to Arlo’s Smart Premier, which provides cloud recordings and user-defined motion zones to reduce false notifications.



Vivo Y95

SMARTPHONE

\$349 (without contract)

This 6.22-inch Android smartphone features a rear dual-camera system – consisting of a 13-megapixel camera and a 2-megapixel camera – and a 20-megapixel front-facing camera. The front-facing camera features artificial intelligence (AI) technology, such as AI Face Beauty and AI Selfie Lighting, that detects a subject’s age, gender, skin tone and lighting environment, and automatically enhances the subject’s features.



Astell & Kern A&ultima SP1000M

PORTABLE AUDIO PLAYER

\$3,599

The A&ultima SP1000M is the latest portable high-resolution audio player in Astell & Kern’s line-up. Powered by dual AK4497EQ chips from Asahi Kasei – each dedicated to a stereo channel – the SP1000M boasts high-resolution and three-dimensional sound. Its octa-core processor enables fast performance regardless of the size of music files. Its 4.1-inch LCD touchscreen allows users to easily control the device with one hand. It has a 128GB onboard memory, which can be expanded via a microSD card.



Tecware Haste XL RGB

GAMING MOUSEPAD

\$35

Measuring 80cm by 30cm, the Tecware Haste XL RGB easily fits a full-sized keyboard, with ample space for mouse movement. It has a high-density surface engineered for precise mouse movements and a non-slip rubber base for a secure grip. Furthermore, it has RGB illumination along its edges with 10 pre-set lighting effects.



ROG Rapture GT-AX11000 Call Of Duty: Black Ops 4 Edition

GAMING ROUTER

\$699

Asus’ gaming brand Republic Of Gamers (ROG) has partnered game developer Activision to create the limited-edition ROG Rapture GT-AX11000 Call Of Duty: Black Ops 4 Edition gaming router. Its hardware and software user interface feature Black Ops 4’s military-themed design elements. The router comes with a download code for a free PC copy of the game, which is redeemable till April.



Casio Edifice EQS-920

WATCH

From \$219

The Casio Edifice EQS-920 is for those who dislike having to charge their watches. It works on solar power and one charge is said to last five months. To check the battery level, simply press and hold a button and the inset hand will point to either L (low), M (medium) or H (high).



Compiled by Trevor Tan

ST readers' first meals of 2019

Newsmakers share what they eat for their first meal in 2019 on Instagram

Rebecca Lynne Tan
StraitsTimesFood.com Editor

From roti prata and fishball noodles to vegetarian bee hoon, dim sum, avocado toast and even caviar – these were just some of the delicious eats that diners tucked into yesterday.

The Straits Times food website ST Food asked newsmakers, celebrities and readers to share their first meals on Instagram with the hashtags #firstmeal2019 and #straitstimesfood.

The first posts started streaming in soon after midnight.

One of the first newsmakers to post a photo of his meal was Minister of State for National Development and Manpower Chua Chu Kang GRC Member of Parliament Zaqy Mohamad, who went to Adam Food Centre in Adam Road for supper last night after the countdown. He posted a photo of himself at about 2.30am yesterday, holding a plate of mutton kway teow goreng.

Actress Janice Koh, who starred in the Hollywood rom-com Crazy Rich Asians, posted a home-cooked breakfast of eggs fried sunny side up and sliced avocado, while hotelier and restaurateur Loh Lik Peng's first meal was a plain roti prata slathered with fish curry. Mr Loh is behind the Unlisted Collection group of restaurants and hotels, which include restaurants such as Zen, Burnt Ends and The Market

Grill.

Newsmakers who spent their New Year's Day overseas also shared photos and videos on what they noshed on.

Wild Rice's founder and artistic director Ivan Heng shared photos of nasi goreng and tropical fruit in Bali. Actor Hossan Leong tantalised his followers with a video of battered fish and chips and a fennel pear salad from Love Fish Restaurant in Sydney, Australia.

Other newsmakers who posted their first meals on Instagram yesterday include Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC MP Teo Ser Luck, celebrity chef Alvin Leung, social entrepreneur Elim Chew, film-maker Jasmine Ng as well as artists Heman Chong and Sarah Choo.

Check out their posts as well as posts from readers in an interactive graphic – str.sg/firstmeal2019.

Go to str.sg/o6Ny to read more about #firstmeal2019 with ST Food.

You can participate too – use the hashtags #firstmeal2019 and #straitstimesfood and be sure you mention, tag and follow @straitstimesfood on Instagram.

rltan@sph.com.sg

Follow Rebecca Lynne Tan on Twitter @STRebeccaTan

ST SCAN TO SEE

What did newsmakers and ST readers have for their first meal in 2019?

<http://str.sg/firstmeal2019>



Film-maker Jasmine Ng jazzed up her cup noodles with a big abalone. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/JASMINE NG



Actor Hossan Leong had fish and chips in Sydney. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/HOSSAN LEONG



Actress Janice Koh had a home-cooked breakfast of eggs and avocado. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/JANICE KOH



Minister of State for National Development and Manpower Zaqy Mohamad ate mutton kway teow for supper. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/ZAQY MOHAMAD



Theatre veteran Ivan Heng had a Balinese breakfast of nasi goreng. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/IVAN HENG



(From left) Artist Sonny Liew had raisin bread and milk tea; artist Heman Chong woke up to eggs, tomatoes and chorizo; restaurateur Loh Lik Peng ate roti prata; and MP Teo Ser Luck had mee siam with kopi tarik. PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/SONNY LIEW, INSTAGRAM/HEMAN CHONG, INSTAGRAM/LOH LIK PENG, INSTAGRAM/TEO SER LUCK



(From left) Ms Brillyn Toh, owner of second-hand shop Hock Siong, had a breakfast cooked by volunteers at Willing Hearts; writer and magician Ning Cai had grapes; chef Alvin Leung kicked off his day with caviar; and social entrepreneur Elim Chew (far left) shared a meal with loved ones. PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/BRILLYN TOH, INSTAGRAM/NING CAI, INSTAGRAM/ALVIN LEUNG, INSTAGRAM/ELIM CHEW

Slash: Big rock 'n' roll revolution coming soon



Hard rock guitarist Slash (centre) will be back to perform here with lead vocalist Myles Kennedy (second from left) and members of The Conspirators (from extreme left) Todd Kerns, Brent Fitz and Frank Sidoris in a show that will feature songs from their latest album. PHOTO: BANDWAGON

Guns N' Roses guitarist expects the 'struggling' genre to make a strong comeback

Eddino Abdul Hadi
Music Correspondent

As one of the most recognisable members in American hard rock icon Guns N' Roses, guitarist Slash played a vital role in rock music's heady years in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The genre has seen better days, he says. "As far as rock 'n' roll is concerned, it's sort of struggling over the past 10 years," Slash adds in an e-mail interview.

The 53-year-old musician and songwriter will be back in Singapore on Tuesday to stage a concert with singer Myles Kennedy and

their band The Conspirators at The Coliseum.

"I think rock music has been going through a lot of ebb and flow. It's been pretty quiet since, say, the middle of the millennium," he says.

"You have a couple of great artists who come out here and there, but there's not, like, a big movement where you've got a ton of new music, all very inspiring."

Slash, whose real name is Saul Hudson, feels that there is too much focus on Top 40 music these days, but he is optimistic that the style of music he plays will soon make a comeback in a big way.

He says: "I definitely feel there's a renaissance coming, like a rock 'n' roll revolution with all these kids that are doing it right now. There's definitely an energy there so I'm excited to see where it's going to be in the next few years."

And while Guns N' Roses are

currently riding high on their world-wide Not In This Lifetime tour, reported by Billboard as one of the top five grossing tours of all time, Slash has also been busy making new music with The Conspirators.

In September last year, the band released their third album, *Living The Dream*. It topped Billboard's Hard Rock Albums charts and peaked at No. 4 in Britain.

He is enjoying the change of pace with The Conspirators, compared with Guns N' Roses, which he describes as a "behemoth onslaught".

Slash has performed in Singapore three times – with Kennedy at Fort Canning in 2010 and the Singapore Indoor Stadium in 2011, and with Guns N' Roses at Changi Exhibition Centre in 2017.

Elaborating on The Conspirators' show, he says: "It's more of a stripped-down, very simple rock 'n' roll band that play in smaller, more

intimate venues and what not. So it's really different."

The set for the upcoming concert here will feature songs from *Living The Dream*, which he says was influenced by the blues and old rock 'n' roll music that he was listening to at home and in his car. Most of these songs comprise guitar riffs that he recorded on his mobile phone while in hotel rooms and dressing rooms around the world.

Slash speaks highly of lead vocalist Kennedy, 49, who also sings with rock band Alter Bridge.

"He has a very natural ability. He doesn't try to be something that he's not. In this day and age, it's very hard to find someone who's not trying to sing like somebody else or trying to force a square peg through a round hole stylistically with their capabilities."

dinohadi@sph.com.sg

BOOK IT / SLASH FEATURING MYLES KENNEDY AND THE CONSPIRATORS LIVE IN SINGAPORE

WHERE: The Coliseum, Hard Rock Hotel Singapore, Resorts World Sentosa, 8 Sentosa Gateway

WHEN: Tuesday, 8pm

ADMISSION: \$148 from Sistic (go to www.sistic.com.sg)

or call 6348-5555) and \$168 at the door. VIP tickets at \$228 (go to www.bandwagon.asia/shows/slash)

Gig to raise funds to showcase local music talents abroad

Eddino Abdul Hadi
Music Correspondent

The world will get to hear and see more of Singapore's music artists, thanks to a new push to export home-grown music by The Music Society, Singapore.

To help fund these music export projects, the non-profit organisation is holding its first fund-raising festival at *Scape The Ground Theatre on Saturday.

The eight-hour show will be headlined by three acts – R&B/pop singer Sezairi, singer-songwriter and electronic music artist Linying and post-hardcore band Caracal.

It will feature two bands popular in the alternative music scene in the early 2000s – alternative/pop-rock quintet West Grand Boulevard and post-hardcore band A Vacant Affair – as well as R&B/pop singer YA and



Home-grown singer-songwriter and electronic music artist Linying and R&B/pop singer Sezairi (both above) will headline the eight-hour show, together with post-hardcore band Caracal. PHOTOS: THE MUSIC SOCIETY SINGAPORE, JOVIAN LIM



trip-hop/chillwave musician Houg.

The gig will have food and beverage stalls as well as karaoke and an exhibition on local album artworks. It will be hosted by Inch and Tim De

Cotta, both of whom are singers, songwriters and musicians.

The money raised will help Singapore artists present their music at markets in Asia and the Pacific, says

The Music Society, Singapore president David Siow.

"The local music community will benefit by obtaining slots at festivals, showcases, marketing campaigns, distribution and label deals, to name a few things. Music export is expensive and not profitable, so this can happen only if we have the funds."

The society's council includes professionals in the music industry, such as its chairman Syaheed Msbi and vice-chairman Danny Loong. It hopes to raise \$70,000, which is half of its annual operating budget, through the concert.

It has secured donations from home-grown firms such as production house Verycrafty and music equipment providers Ebenex.

In the past, the organisation had benefited from a \$310,000 National Arts Council seed grant for 3½ years. The money was used for gigs,

workshops, networking sessions and projects aimed at raising the artistic and marketing capabilities of home-grown musicians.

These include the Steve Lillywhite Production week in 2013, where it flew in the producer behind commercially and critically successful bands such as U2, The Killers and Talking Heads and got him to work with local bands such as The Sam Willows and sub:shaman.

In 2015, it organised several overseas gigs by local acts as part of the Singapore: Inside Out travelling showcase. This took singer-songwriters Charlie Lim and Gentle Bones to London, electronic-instrumental group SA and indie band Take Two to Beijing, and Caracal and rapper The LionCityBoy to New York.

For Saturday's gig, attendees are expected to pay at least \$30. They can also contribute online at www.sgmuso.org/donate

BOOK IT / THE OUTER LIMITS (A FUND-RAISING MUSIC FESTIVAL)

WHERE: *Scape The Ground Theatre, 2 Orchard Link

WHEN: Saturday, 3 to 10pm

ADMISSION: Pay \$30 or more (go to bit.ly/theouterlimitsSG)

SINGAPORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA At the Esplanade Concert Hall

SSO.ORG.SG



JAN 5

TINE THING HELSETH-ARUTIUNIAN TRUMPET CONCERTO

Jun Märkl, conductor
Tine Thing Helseth, trumpet

Tickets from \$15

40 YEARS OF GREAT MUSIC



YOUR SSO – 40 YEARS OF GREAT MUSIC

JAN 18

SSO 40TH ANNIVERSARY GALA

Lan Shui, conductor
Lim Yan, piano

Tickets from \$25

LIMITED TICKETS AVAILABLE



JAN 25 & 26
LAN SHUI'S FAREWELL: MAHLER 2

Lan Shui, conductor
Miah Persson, soprano
Anna Larsson, mezzo-soprano
Singapore Symphony Chorus and Youth Choir
Hallelujah Chorus
The Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Singapore
Singapore Bible College Community Choir, Canticorum
The Choir of the Transylvania State Philharmonic
Eudence Palaruan, choral director
Wong Lai Foon, choirmaster

Tickets from \$15

LIMITED TICKETS AVAILABLE



GoAheadQuoteMe



Is it really unhealthy if it makes you so happy? I'm not innovative in the kitchen (so I go to) Patsy's Pizza in Harlem, that has pretty much the best pizza on the whole planet.



ACTOR RYAN REYNOLDS on where he indulges during cheat days



For a really long time, I felt so misunderstood about the way I dressed, the way I talked, my attitude. They thought it was shallow. I'm so proud to be (myself) this far, but the truth is, you gave birth to me.



LADY GAGA, speaking last week at her opening show in a Las Vegas residency



Actor Christian Bale (top right) transformed into Dick Cheney (above) with a weight gain of 18kg together with make-up and prosthetics in the new movie Vice, and a file picture of the former US Vice-President (right). PHOTOS: ANNAPURNA PICTURES, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



How Bale transforms into Dick Cheney

Advances in prosthetics have allowed artists to create fleshy hyper-realistic likenesses – and also allow actors to be expressive

NEW YORK • You would be forgiven for not recognising Christian Bale in Vice, a new movie in which he stars as former American Vice-President Dick Cheney.

Long creases run from his nostrils to his jowls, which sink into a starched collar. His jaw takes on the shape of a baseball and heavy forehead lines hover over a thick, furrowed brow.

Even an actor as committed as Bale – who gained 18kg for the role – could not pull off this metamorphosis alone. The film-makers enlisted a team of Oscar-winning prosthetic and make-up artists to help Bale step into five different stages of his character's life.

For years, prosthetics made actors who wore them look not quite human, but advances in materials and expertise have allowed artists

to create remarkable likenesses. While they are now often used to achieve fleshy hyper-realism, the initial purpose of prosthetics was the exact opposite.

"For many decades, it was just monsters and creatures," said Brian Wade, an artist who sculpted facial pieces for Vice. He grew up admiring classic beasts like the 1931 Frankenstein – which used crude makeshift materials like cotton and spirit gum to transform Boris Karloff into the wretched creature – and the primates in the 1968 Planet Of The Apes, which were a breakthrough for the field.

Aiming for a higher quality than masks allowed, make-up artist John Chambers developed a type of foam rubber and created facial appliances that allowed actors to talk and emote.

But while Chambers' apes were revolutionary at the time, they look cartoonish by today's standards. And despite his best efforts and those of other pioneers like Dick Smith (1972's The Godfather) and Rick Baker (1977's Star Wars), the make-up artistry of that era re-

mained held back by a minimal knowledge base, paltry budgets and low expectations.

"We were still doing everything by hand," make-up artist Ve Neill recalled. She said that when a set of prosthetic Klingon heads was mistakenly ruined in Star Trek: The Motion Picture (1979), film-makers opted not to redo them, but rather, obscure the characters with a smoke machine.

In the 1980 movie The Elephant Man, director David Lynch initially treated prosthetics so cavalierly that he planned to create the title character's severely deformed face himself.

Only after he hit a dead end did he enlist Christopher Tucker, who honed his craft by reading chemistry books about foam latex and testing out concoctions in his mother's oven in England.

But realism was still a long way off, in large part because of the limitations of foam latex, the industry's preferred prosthetic material. Latex looked rubbery – it changed in texture depending on temperature or other chemicals in the air.

In the 1990s, leading prosthetic artists started covertly experimenting with silicone, spending months mixing materials in their own laboratories and refusing to reveal their secrets to one another.

As make-up improved, so did computer-generated imagery, which some artists viewed as a threat.

Characters who might have previously been created with prosthetics, like the tentacled Davy Jones in the Pirates Of The Caribbean series, were now created digitally.

But CGI also allowed film-makers to erase small mistakes around the edges of silicone pieces, taking away the burden of perfection.

No digital touch-ups were necessary for Vice. The goal was to both create a likeness and allow Bale to be expressive.

"There was an understanding that it would be an amalgam of Christian Bale and Dick Cheney, without covering his entire face," Wade said.

"The most successful make-up aren't the ones where you're trying to completely hide the actor." NTIMES

தமிழ்மூலம்

Lost in translation?

A → அ

Tamil Murasu provides error-free translation from English to Tamil

Proof reading available

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Ushering in 2019 with spirited music, champagne and fireworks

REVIEW / CONCERT

NEW YEAR'S EVE
COUNTDOWN CONCERT 2019
The Philharmonic Orchestra
– Lim Yau, Lin Juan (conductors),
William Ledbetter (host)
Victoria Concert Hall/Monday

Mervin Beng

The mention of a New Year's concert usually conjures up an image of pomp – beautifully dressed ballroom dancers and an endless flow of waltzes by the Strauss family played by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

Here, in Singapore, concertgoers join The Philharmonic Orchestra (TPO) in ushering in the new year.

Now in its eighth run, the concert was held at the Victoria Concert Hall for the first time this year, bringing a more festive atmosphere and a better chance to enjoy the grand fireworks display at Marina Bay.

Veteran host of classical concerts William Ledbetter once again kicked off proceedings, cajoling the audience and ensuring that spirits were high throughout the evening.

Conductor Lim Yau opened the

concert with a crisp, spirited performance of Smetana's Overture To The Bartered Bride.

He has been at the helm of TPO, a project which he initiated, since 1998 and the ease with which he worked with the musicians was clear to see. The way the strings handled their delicate runs decorating the overture showed how far amateur string-playing has developed over the years.

Lim passed the baton over to his son Lin Juan for the showcase work of the evening – the Firebird Suite (1919 version) by Igor Stravinsky. As it turned out, this was more than a "special guest" appearance, as Ledbetter had described.

Lin, an established concert cellist and assistant conductor of the Singapore National Youth Orchestra, directed all the other works for the evening and seemed well on his way to take on a greater role at TPO. Precision and thoughtfulness are hallmarks of Lin's musicianship, and both were evident in his conducting at this concert.

The Firebird Suite is a handful for any community orchestra, but Lin and the TPO were well up to the challenge.

Lin's sensible tempos and clear direction helped, and there was distinct shading and characterisation

of each of the five movements. The Infernal Dance Of King Kastchei was delivered with manic drive, followed by a wonderful bassoon solo from Emerald Chee in the gentle Berceuse (Lullaby).

The treat of champagne for all adult concertgoers during the extended intermission certainly lifted spirits, and the second half was a time of celebration and reflection, beginning with Offenbach's Overture To Orpheus In The Underworld and the obligatory waltz, in the form of Lehar's Gold And Silver Waltz.

There was fine playing throughout, especially the solos by David Zechariah Kwek (clarinet) and Edward Tan (concertmaster).

Lin was always in tight control, although for these pieces, more give-and-take would have lifted the dance rhythms and persuaded some of the audience members to take to the floor, as they have in previous years.

Pavane by Faure was a quiet, contemplative high point for the evening, not just for the lush orchestral sound that Lin pulled together and Shirley Tong's exquisite flute solo, but also for the opportunity to recognise the list of great individuals who made an impact on the world and had died last year.

With great timing, Elgar's Pomp And Circumstance March No. 1 brought the concert to a close 12 minutes before midnight, in time for the concertgoers to stream out to the lawn in front of the Victoria Concert Hall to usher in 2019 and view the spectacular fireworks.

Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (PG) (V)
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
9.40 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (V)
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
PM
12.00 Worst Cooks In America 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (V)
1.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 3 (SC)
2.30 Arts 21 (HD) (Cul)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (PG) (IE)
3.40 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)
4.00 Meet The MP (HD) (PG) (SC)
4.30 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (V)
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
6.20 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)
6.30 Divided (US) (HD) (PG) (V)
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)
7.30 Make You Laugh Out Loud 4b (PG) (V)
8.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 The Wish (CC) (IE)
10.00 The Truth About Fake News (HD) (CC) (IE)
11.00 Scorpion 2 (HD) (PG) (D)
11.50 Just For Laughs Gags 18 (HD) (V)
AM
12.00 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
12.30 Whacked Out Sports (PG) (V)
12.50 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)/1.40 This Is Us (HD) (PG) (D)
2.30 Grimm 5 (HD) (PG13) (D)
3.20 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
3.50 Worst Cooks In America 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)/4.40 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (V)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
5.45 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Classic Golden Melody 2018 (V)
7.00 Frontline (CC) (CA)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (News)

8.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 2017 (IE)
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)
PM
12.30 Street Smart (V)
1.00 News 8 At One (HD)
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 New Doraemon (S)
2.30 Your Hand In Mine (HD) (CC) (D)
3.30 Love Thy Neighbour (PG) (CC) (D)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 118 Reunion (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (HD) (News)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Taste Of Love (CC) (V)
9.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight (HD)
10.30 Fruit, Veggies & Me 2 (HD) (CC) (IE)
11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D)
AM
12.00 The Princess Weiyong (PG) (D)
1.00 Celebrity Chef 2 (HD) (V)
2.00 Changing Fortunes (D)
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM
3.00 Scrum! (PG) (CC) (D)
4.00 Greener Pastures (CC) (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Menu (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Business As Usual (CC) (IE) (Finale)
10.00 Black Knight (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 Business As Usual (CC) (IE) (Finale)
AM
12.30 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 News Now (HD)
6.30 In Search Of Umami (HD) (CC)
7.00 First Look Asia (HD)
9.00 Asia Business First (HD)
10.02 Why It Matters 2
11.00 News Now (HD)
PM
1.02 Real Deal
2.00 News Now

4.02 Why It Matters 2
5.00 News Now (HD)
7.02 Real Deal (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
9.02 Champions For Change (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight (HD)
11.02 Real Deal
AM
12.00 News Now (HD)
12.30 Power List Asia 6
1.02 Champions For Change
2.00 News Now
2.30 The Successors 5
3.02 Why It Matters 2
4.00 News Now (HD)
4.30 Millionaire Minds
5.02 Champions For Change
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Azhagiya Snehithi 2 (IE)
4.00 Sundaram Kudumbathinar (HD) (D)
4.30 Vivegam (IE)
5.30 Mighty Raju (S)
6.00 Ishq Ka Rang Safed (PG) (Hindi) (D)
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam (Cul)
7.30 Mella Thiranthathu Kathavu 2 (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Adukku Veetu Annasamy (HD) (CC) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Ethiroli 15 (HD) (CC) (CA)
9.30 Theerpugal 4 (CC) (IE)
10.00 Kannum Kannum Kollaiyadithal (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
10.30 Bayam (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 Nyabagam Varuthae 3 (V)
11.30 Tamil Seithi (Encore) (News)
AM
12.00 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Messy Goes To Okido (HD) (P)
9.30 Teddies (P)
10.00 Floogals (HD) (P)
10.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)
11.00 Dora The Explorer 8 (HD) (P)
11.30 Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood (HD) (P)
PM
12.00 Bugsville (P)

12.30 Teddies (HD) (IE)
1.00 Little Charmers (HD) (P)
1.30 Messy Goes To Okido (HD) (P)
2.00 Floogals (HD) (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)
3.00 Dora The Explorer 8 (HD) (P)
3.30 Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood (HD) (P)
4.00 All Over The Workplace (S)
4.30 Sherazade: The Untold Stories (S)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Grizzly & The Lemmings (S)
6.00 The Lion Guard (S)
6.30 Totally Totto (HD) (S)
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (HD) (CC) (S)
7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (HD) (CC) (S)
8.00 Star Wars Rebels (HD) (CC) (S)
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (HD) (CC) (S)
9.00 AFF Suzuki Cup 2018 (HD) (Sports) (Encore)
11.00 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)

SURIA

AM
12.00 Close
PM
3.00 Juxbox Ekspres
4.00 Seindah Takdir Cinta (PG) (D)
5.00 Rintihan Hati (HD) (CC) (D)
6.00 Ejen Ali (HD) (S)
6.30 Top 5 Makan (CC) (IE) (Debut)
7.00 Teratai Kemboja (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Detik (PG) (CA)
9.00 Jejak Jenayah (PG) (CC) (IE)
9.30 Sri Bella (HD) (PG) (CC) (D) (Finale)
10.30 Dara Zara (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)
11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R)
AM
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs; CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture; D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies; P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance; R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom; V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)
Soak up culture: art, music, food, history. It is best if it is unfamiliar, as your mind is primed for discoveries.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)
You are more thoughtful than usual. Reconsider old beliefs or see if you can stretch yourself mentally.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)
Avoid hard and fast ideas – you need to be as flexible as possible when it comes to new thinking.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)
Get out in the community and do good. Your energy is right for making sure people's needs are met.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)
You are incredibly generous and are willing to give up your last dollar to help a friend in need.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)
Do not let yourself get too worked up over changes. The less you struggle against them, the better.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)
Your mental energy is overflowing and you ought to make the most of it. Explore big ideas.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)
Exercise scepticism because things are not what they seem. Keep your ears open for information.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)
Your amazing energy helps your friends deal with their issues. Lend a hand wherever you can.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)
You are moving more quickly than you should. Pay attention to the details and get help if you need.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)
Someone new makes a great impression on you and this could lead to romance or a deep friendship.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)
Take greater care than usual with your words. They can get you in big trouble if you are not careful.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Carol Smith
PM
1.00 Charmaine Yee
4.00 Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 ONE FM's #1 Breakfast Show With Glenn And The Flying Dutchman
10.00 Cheryl Miles
PM
4.00 Weekdays With ONE FM

MONEY FM 89.3

AM
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker, Yasmin Jonkers & Ryan Huang
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim
PM
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim

UFM100.3

AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kemlin
PM
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weillong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna
PM
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7.08am/7.10pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 3.50am/4.10pm

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 2.16am (1.5m), 8.11am (2.7m), 3.11pm (0.9m), 9.54pm (2.5m). Desaru: 1.52am (1.8m), 7.26am (2.5m), 2.15pm (1.1m), 9.33pm (2.6m). Port Dickson: 4.08am (2.4m), 11.10am (0.7m), 4.43pm (1.9m), 10.51pm (0.7m). Mersing: 1.38am (2.1m), 6.25am (2.5m), 1.36pm (1.2m), 8.59pm (2.9m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore 3.18am (1.6m), 8.58am (2.8m), 3.58pm (0.7m), 10.54pm (2.6m). Desaru: 3.01am (1.8m), 8.11am (2.5m), 3.03pm (1m), 10.33pm (2.7m). Port Dickson: 5.01am (2.5m), 12.01pm (0.7m), 5.34pm (2m), 11.43pm (0.6m). Mersing: 3.04am (2.1m), 7.05am (2.4m), 2.17pm (1.1m), 9.49pm (3.1m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
6.40 Pawn Stars 18
7.05 Storage Wars 11
7.35 The Pickers 10
8.30 Pawn Stars 19
9.30 The Pickers 13
11.20 Forged In Fire 3
PM
12.15 Swamp People 9
1.10 Mountain Men 7
2.05 Lone Star Restoration
3.00 Pawn Stars 18
3.30 The Pickers 13
5.20 Mountain Men 7
6.15 The Pickers 10
7.10 Pawn Stars 19
8.05 Storage Wars: Texas 6
8.30 Storage Wars 10
9.00 The Pickers 9
9.55 Ancient Aliens 11
10.50 American Ripper
11.45 Swamp People 9

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
6.30 Dance Moms 6
7.30 My Ring Story
8.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
9.00 Flipping Vegas 3
10.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
11.00 The Best Moment To Quit Your Job
PM
12.00 Dance Moms 6
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 Tiny House Of Terror
3.35 Married At First Sight Australia 4
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown
7.00 Little Women LA: Terra's Little Family
7.30 Married At First Sight Australia 4
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 House Of Darkness
11.35 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
6.45 Forces Of Nature
8.30 The HBO Movie Show
8.55 Children Of Men (NC16)
10.40 Daredevil (NC16)
PM
12.20 Going In Style (2017) (NC16)
2.00 Pacific Rim: Uprising (NC16)
3.50 Confessions Of A Shopaholic
5.35 Meet The Parents
7.20 Johnny English Reborn
9.00 Phantom Thread
11.10 Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (M18)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
6.45 Basic Instinct (NC16)
8.40 The Others (NC16)
10.25 We're No Angels (1989)
PM
12.10 Sleepless (NC16)
1.45 Johnny English
3.15 Howard The Duck

5.10 Mercury Rising
7.00 Bugs (NC16)
8.25 Kidnap (NC16)
10.00 Renegades (NC16)
11.45 Strike Back (M18)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
6.00 Destiny By Love (HD)
7.00 Maids (HD)
8.15 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)
9.15 Downy (HD)
10.15 Viva La Romance (HD)
PM
12.15 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)
1.30 Maids (HD)
2.45 The King Vs The King 2 (HD)
4.45 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)
6.00 Downy (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)
8.00 The Fei Ge Show (HD)
10.00 The King's Woman (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
7.00 Figure Skating: ISU Senior Grand Prix Finals 2018: Vancouver, Senior Ladies' Short Programme
8.00 Cycling: 2018 Saitama Criterium By Le Tour De France Highlights
9.00 Extreme Sports: World Surf League 2018: Women's Hawaiian Pro Highlights
10.00 Tennis: ATP 500 Rakuten Japan Open Tennis Championships Day 5 Quarter-finals
PM
6.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
7.00 Mubadala World Tennis Championship 2018 Day 3 3rd Place Match
9.00 Mubadala World Tennis Championship 2018 Day 3 Finals
11.00 Cycling: 2018 Shanghai Criterium By Le Tour De France Highlights

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
7.00 The Football Review
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport. TV
8.00 Wrestling: WWE Experience (PG)
9.00 Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG)
11.00 The Football Review
11.30 Football: The EFL Highlights 2018/19 - Show 20
PM
12.00 Magazine: Omnisport. TV
5.30 National Basketball League Round 11 Cairns Taipans Vs Perth Wildcats
2.30 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 26 Nottingham Forest Vs Leeds United
4.30 Wrestling: WWE This Week (PG)
5.00 The Football Review
5.30 National Basketball League Round 11 Melbourne United Vs Adelaide 36ers
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport. TV
8.00 Magazine: The Burning Issue
8.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Westports Malaysia Dragons Vs Saigon Heat (Live)
10.30 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
8.00 Teen Titans Go!
9.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
10.00 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernooobs
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls
PM
12.00 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 The Powerpuff Girls
3.00 Running Man Animation
3.30 Craig Of The Creek
4.00 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Ben 10
6.00 Adventure Time – Minecraft Special
6.15 Adventure Time
6.30 Running Man Animation
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
7.30 Grizzy And The Lemmings
8.00 We Bare Bears
9.00 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 Valor
6.45 The Amazing Race 30
7.35 America's Got Talent 13
9.15 American Ninja Warrior 7
10.05 Valor
10.55 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2
11.45 The Amazing Race 30
PM
12.35 The Elements: Cosentino
1.25 Quantic 2
2.15 American Ninja Warrior 7
3.05 Valor
3.55 The Elements: Cosentino
4.45 Alias 3
5.35 American Ninja Warrior 7
6.25 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2
7.15 The Amazing Race 30
8.05 NCIS: Los Angeles 8
9.45 Seal Team 2
10.35 Supernatural 14
11.25 Seal Team 2

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 iZombie 3
6.50 Person Of Interest 4
7.40 Lethal Weapon 2
8.30 Deception
9.20 The Mentalist 5

10.10 iZombie 3
11.00 Breaking The Magician's Code
11.45 The Dark Knight Rises
PM
2.45 Friends 7
3.10 Breaking The Magician's Code
4.00 The Mentalist 5
4.50 Deception
5.40 Person Of Interest 4
6.30 The Mentalist 5
7.20 Friends 7
8.10 Top 20 Funniest 2
9.00 Lethal Weapon 3
9.50 Green Lantern
11.55 Friends 7

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2
6.25 The Daily Show 24
6.50 Just For Laughs Gags 10
7.15 Instant Mom 3
8.05 Your Face Or Mine 4
8.30 Most Ridiculous
9.00 Billy On The Street 5
9.20 Takeshi's Castle 4
9.45 Just For Laughs Gags 14
10.10 The Moose 8
10.35 Almost Royals
11.05 Saturday Night Live 43
11.45 The Daily Show 24
PM
12.10 Jane Lynch - Tall Blonde And Handsome
1.00 Just For Laughs Gags 14
1.25 Inside Comedy
2.25 Just For Laughs Gags 14
2.50 Takeshi's Castle 4
3.15 The Moose 8
3.40 Almost Royals
4.10 Lip Sync Battle 4
5.00 Key & Peele 4
5.50 Goddamn Comedy Jam
6.30 The Daily Show 24
6.55 Your Face Or Mine 4
7.20 Most Ridiculous
7.50 Billy On The Street 5
8.15 Takeshi's Castle 4
8.40 The Goldbergs 5
9.30 Hot In Cleveland 5
10.20 Saturday Night Live 44
11.05 Inglorious Pranksters
11.30 The Daily Show 24

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Chronicle Of Love
7.00 First Love
8.00 Entrepreneurial Age
9.00 Speed
10.00 100% Wife
PM
12.10 First Love
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.10 Entrepreneurial Age
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.00 100% Wife
9.10 First Love
10.10 Entrepreneurial Age
11.00 Speed

Emily Blunt’s pay less than half of co-star Dwayne Johnson’s

NEW YORK • Emily Blunt faces a blunt truth – despite her box-office appeal, the actress is drawing far less money than Dwayne Johnson.

Word is that Blunt banked in only US\$9 million (\$12.3 million) for her work in Disney’s upcoming Jungle Cruise movie while he took home US\$22 million.

This, despite her sharing credit with Johnson as co-leads, according to gossip portal TMZ.

While Johnson does pack a punch at the box office with hits such as Jumanji: Welcome To The Jungle (2017) and Furious 7 (2015), Blunt is also a proven knockout.

Her current movie, Mary Poppins Returns, was slated to gross US\$200 million by New Year’s Day, Hollywood Reporter noted.

Johnson has yet to win major award nominations for his acting, but her Mary Poppins Returns turn has bagged Blunt a 2019 Golden Globes nod for Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture, Musical or Comedy.

She also drew critical acclaim for her portrayal of a mother under duress in spooky thriller A Quiet Place last year.

The latest news of income inequality shows how far Hollywood

– roiled by campaigns last year to stamp out sexual harassment and create a more level playing field for everyone in the industry – still has to go.

Oscar winner Emma Stone said in an interview in 2017: “In my career so far, I’ve needed my male co-stars to take a pay cut so that I may have parity with them. And that’s something they do for me because they feel it is what’s right and fair.”

Meanwhile, Johnson has put his money to heart-warming use, posting on Instagram that he bought a new house for his mother for Christmas.

“All our lives growing up, we lived in little apartments all across the country. Lived like gypsies on the road from one state to another.

“The first home my parents ever lived in was the one I bought for them in 1999. They divorced about five years later. Since then, I’ve always made sure my mum and dad have everything they’ll ever need.

“I always say, if you got a good mama, then you got a pretty good shot at becoming a decent human being. And somehow, somewhere along the line, I became lucky to be able to make stuff like this happen,” he wrote, signing off as Dwanta.



Emily Blunt has a good box-office record with movies such as Mary Poppins Returns and A Quiet Place. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Iran TV boss sacked over Jackie Chan sex scene

TEHERAN • Was he sleeping on the job? A regional boss of Iran’s state broadcaster IRIB has been fired after letting a Jackie Chan sex scene slip through its tight censorship rules.

Local media reported on Monday that viewers on Iran’s Kish Island were shocked when a TV station showed the martial arts star having sex with a prostitute in the movie Shinjuku Incident (2009).

That is far beyond the usual limits in Iran, where men and women are not even allowed to shake hands on screen.

There was a quick response after a viewer posted the clip online.

“Clips of immoral scenes of a film featuring Jackie Chan have been circulating on social media which was apparently shown by Kish IRIB,” the semi-official ISNA news agency reported.

“These scenes, which are in total contradiction with the principles of IRIB, have ultimately led to the dismissal and reprimand of some of the employees of IRIB in Kish,” it said, adding this included the director-general.

There were angry responses from some Iranians who pointed out that no one had been fired over a recent bus crash that killed 10 students at Teheran’s Azad University.

“Buses turn over, planes crash, ships sink... no one is dismissed... A few seconds of Jackie Chan making love on IRIB and immediately all staff in that section are sacked,” wrote one Twitter user.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LISTEN NOW: PODCASTS

STBT

http://str.sg/stbtpodcasts

Money Hacks (Mondays)

Financial tips for newbies

Health Check (Tuesdays)

Guide to healthier living

A Game of Two Halves (Tuesdays)

A sports podcast

Life Picks (Thursdays)

The best lifestyle events

Double Feature (Fridays)

Reviewing the big films

MONEYFM

89.3

https://www.moneyfm893.sg/podcast/

The Hot Seat (Mondays)

Business leaders on current trends

Coffee with Claressa (Tuesdays)

Chats with local personalities

Chasing Cars (Wednesdays)

Mars v Venus take on car reviews

Influence (Thursdays)

Secrets to success from local movers and shakers

Mind Your Business (Fridays)

What makes SMEs tick

The most beautiful face

French model Thylane Blondeau, 17, has proven that her first achievement was no fluke. Back in 2007, when she was just six, a group led by TC Candler, creator of the Annual Independent Critics List, had picked her as the world’s “most beautiful face”. She has repeated the feat, topping the 2018 list of 100 names. Previous honourees include Michelle Pfeiffer (1990), Nicole Kidman (1997) and Gwyneth Paltrow (1998).

Carpenters hits given new orchestra backing

NEW YORK • If you have a Carpenters’ greatest hits album, listen to one track, Yesterday Once More. Can you hear an air-conditioner murmur at the start?

Few fans know that, but Richard Carpenter, 72, one half of the famous pop duo, has now corrected that sonic irritation – at least to his discerning ears.

The brother of Karen, whose poignant voice anchored a batch of Carpenters hits from We’ve Only Just Begun (1970) to Rainy Days And Mondays (1971), has twiddled with the song arrangements after he was invited by Universal to do a new album of the classics.

That allowed him to erase some imperfections that came from pressure to release music under a tight deadline at the height of their fame, and also give the songs a fuller sound from working with an orchestra.

The new release – Carpenters With The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra – debuted at No. 52 on the American Billboard chart last month and came in at No. 8 in Britain. A vinyl release is on the cards next month.

But Richard, who conducted the 80-piece orchestra at Abbey Road Studios in London, was disciplined enough not to go overboard with changes.

The voice of Karen – who died of complications from anorexia in 1983 at 32 – was more than enough, he knew, for fans to feel on Top Of The World with the new album.

Singer Jimmy Osmond suffers a stroke



LONDON • American pop singer Jimmy Osmond (left), who performed the chart-topping hit Long-Haired Lover From Liverpool as a child in 1972, has suffered a stroke.

He will take time away from the stage, a spokesman for the singer said on Monday.

Osmond completed a performance of the Peter Pan pantomime on Dec 27 at the Birmingham Hippodrome theatre in central England before he was driven to hospital and diagnosed with a stroke, the representative said in a statement on the theatre’s website.

“He is grateful for all the well wishes and

will be taking time out in the new year,” the spokesman added.

Osmond, 55, was the youngest sibling in The Osmonds family troupe whose most famous members were Donny and Marie.

He became the youngest person to reach No. 1 on Britain’s singles chart with the release of Long-Haired Lover From Liverpool when he was nine.

He had, at age three, already had a sampling of show business when singer Andy Williams introduced the newest Osmond to the world on The Andy Williams Show.

REUTERS

Brand Your Assets

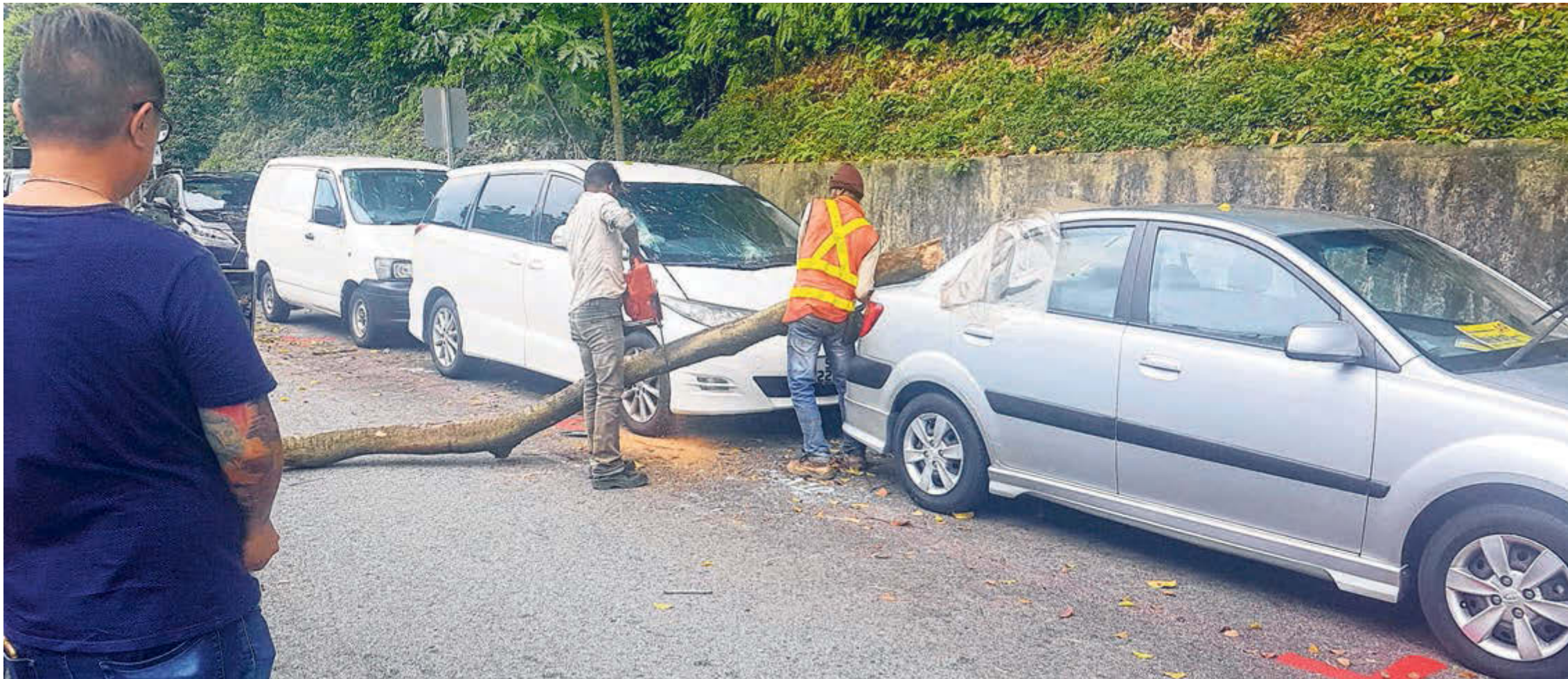
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to publicise your
Financial Statements

NOTICES

B| HOME



IRIS VERGHESE
HEALTH WORKER OFFERED
COMFORT TO SINGAPORE'S
FIRST AIDS PATIENTS **B7**



The owners of the white Toyota Estima and silver Kia Rio, both of which were parked in Turf Club Road, managed to recover repair costs of more than \$12,000 in total for the damage to their cars caused by a falling tree branch on May 27, 2017. PHOTOS: POON POONG MOTORS

Car hit by fallen tree? NParks may cover claim

But it says public liability insurance payout is on case-by-case basis and each claim is assessed on its merit

Joyce Lim
Senior Correspondent

The National Parks Board (NParks) says it has a public liability insurance policy which covers its legal liability for personal injury, loss or damage to property following a fallen tree incident.

But it will consider each case only on its merit.

"Every case has to be assessed based on its own facts. In assessing liability, NParks' insurers will carefully consider all the facts and circumstances of the case, including inspection and maintenance records, the weather report, and NParks' or external experts' findings on the cause of the incident," a spokesman said in response to queries from The Straits Times.

"Each case involving trees will have to be assessed on its own merit," added the spokesman.

NParks, which manages about two million trees lining the streets, in parks and on state land, declined

to comment on any specific case.

In 2017, two car owners managed to recover more than \$12,000 in repair costs to their vehicles damaged by a falling tree branch.

NParks' insurer, First Capital, paid the amount without admitting liability.

In the incident on May 27, 2017, a tree branch snapped and landed on the roof of a white Toyota Estima and a silver Kia Rio, both of which were parked in Turf Club Road.

The windscreens and roofs of the two cars were badly damaged.

Mr Henry Khoo, 38, manager of car workshop Poon Poong Motors, rushed to the scene after a client, one of the car owners, alerted him to the incident.

He called the police, who in turn alerted NParks.

"It is important not to remove your car from the incident site. You should report the incident immediately to the police or agency that is responsible for the tree and wait for someone to come and inspect it," said Mr Khoo, who has handled six cases of fallen tree claims.

"If the incident happens at a private property, you should alert the management of the property," he added.

Mr Khoo, whose workshop repaired the two damaged cars, spent the following six months trying to recover the costs from NParks on behalf of the owners.

ST understands that Mr Khoo's claims were initially dismissed.

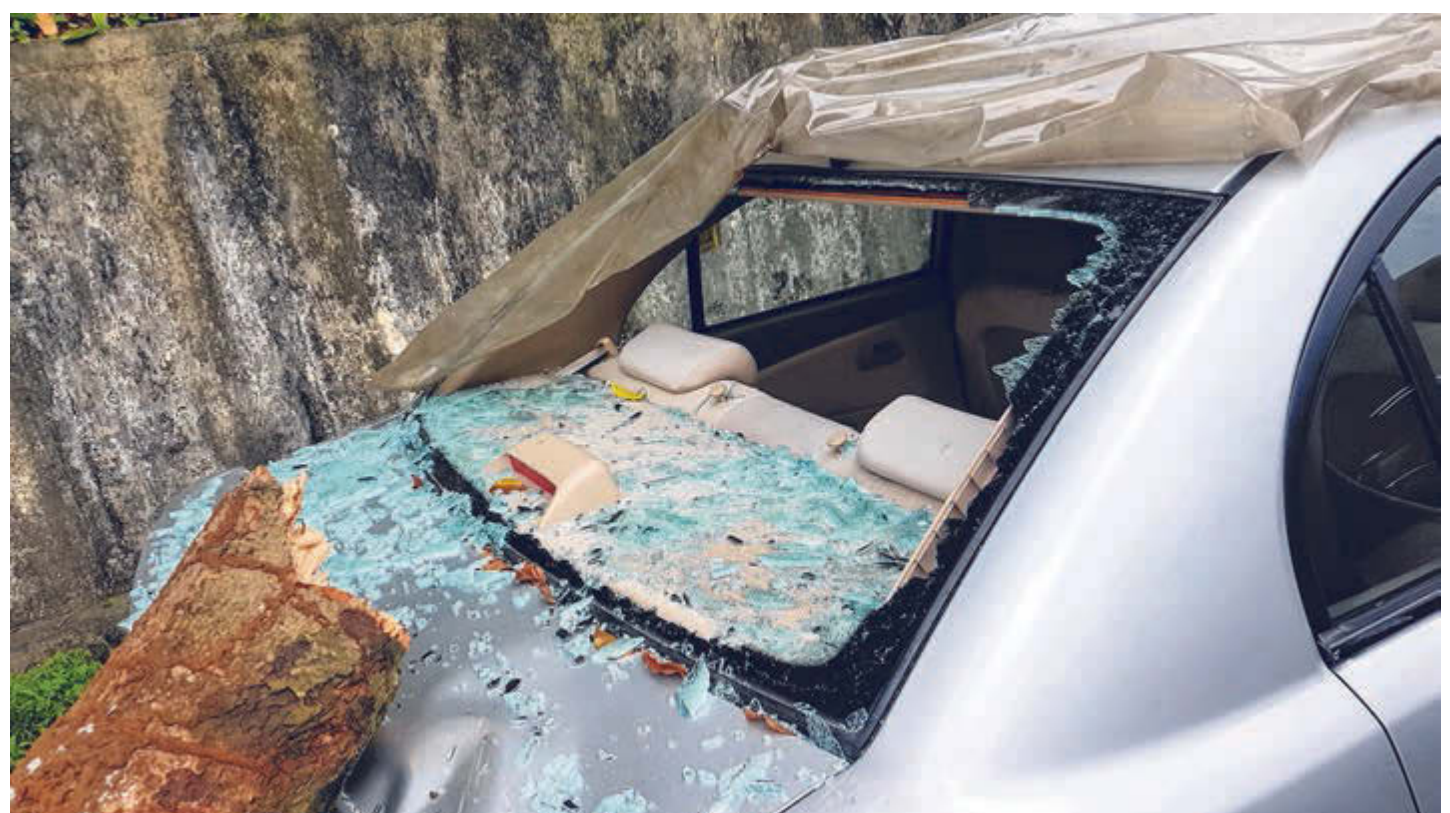
A loss adjuster appointed by First Capital said the fallen tree branch was found to be alive and healthy.

"The snapping of the tree branch was most likely due to strong wind conditions over the days before and on the day of the incident," said the loss adjuster, adding that the unfavourable weather condition was beyond the reasonable control of NParks.

But Mr Khoo stood his ground, maintaining that his own investigation found the affected tree to be infested with termites. He had videos and photographs taken on the day of the incident as proof.

The owners were eventually fully reimbursed for the more than \$12,000 in repair costs for the two cars through the workshop.

Lawyer Chia Boon Teck of Chia



Both the damaged cars were repaired by Poon Poong Motors, which took photos of the damage to the cars (above and left). The workshop took six months trying to recover the costs from NParks on behalf of the owners. NParks' insurer eventually reimbursed the owners the repair costs through the workshop.



In 2013, businessman Victor Yew (left) managed to recover 75 per cent of his repair costs of about \$2,800 from NParks after a tree branch fell and hit his Volkswagen Golf R's windscreen and bonnet in front of TripleOne Somerset. He says he was compensated within three months out of goodwill. ST PHOTO: JOYCE LIM

cred and must never be abused."

In an earlier incident in 2013, car owner Victor Yew managed to recover 75 per cent of his repair costs of some \$2,800.

The 52-year-old businessman was driving his Volkswagen Golf R along Somerset Road in heavy rain when a tree branch fell and hit the car's windscreen and bonnet in front of TripleOne Somerset.

Mr Yew took photos of the 1m tree branch and made a police report on the same day.

"I called NParks the next day and met its officers at the incident site. I wasn't told what caused the tree branch to fall, but I was compensated out of goodwill within three months," said Mr Yew.

On Dec 20 last year, two trees fell at Sembawang Park, injuring 14 people. While investigations are still ongoing, NParks said in a statement a day after the incident that the uprooted trees, which were last inspected in May last year, were found to be healthy.

About 400 cases of fallen trees were recorded last year, up from the 361 reported a year earlier. There were 800 cases recorded in 2016.

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STAY PUT AND REPORT IMMEDIATELY

It is important not to remove your car from the incident site. You should report the incident immediately to the police or agency that is responsible for the tree and wait for someone to come and inspect it. If the incident happens at a private property, you should alert the management of the property.



MR HENRY KHOO, 38, manager of car workshop Poon Poong Motors, who has handled six cases of fallen tree claims.

Wong LLP said: "In most cases, fallen trees would be covered by motor insurance as an Act of God so the motorist may claim insurance. Alternatively, the motorist may make a claim against the tree owner, whether NParks or the town council, but it will not

be easy to prove their negligence."

Mr Chia said: "Our citizens trust our government agencies to conduct themselves honestly and fairly. Most times we have to take their words at face value because we don't have the resources to prove them wrong. This trust is sa-

Grading scheme for maid agencies runs into a snag



When the Trustmark scheme is ready, agencies will need to be graded by the Consumers Association of Singapore and the Manpower Ministry before they can renew their licences. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Issues raised during consultation sessions; launch target missed by more than a year

Joanna Seow
Manpower Correspondent

A planned scheme to grade maid employment agencies and boost the professionalism of the industry has been delayed for over a year after several issues were raised during consultation sessions.

The Trustmark scheme was first announced by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) in March 2016, and was meant to be rolled out by December 2017. That target has been missed by more than a year and it is not yet clear when the scheme will be launched.

When it is ready, agencies will

need to be graded by the Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) and MOM before they can renew their licences.

The Straits Times understands that a pilot run of Trustmark was held in the last quarter of 2017, with nine agencies participating.

They were assessed through documents submitted, as well as through interviews and checks of their practices at their premises.

An MOM spokesman said several consultation sessions with stakeholders such as employment agencies (EAs), EA associations and maid employers have been held, and said the ministry is "deliberating on the views raised".

"A range of issues were raised by EAs, such as the cost and requirements of the grading scheme as well as how it fits with other recent initiatives by MOM, such as customer ratings on the Employment Agencies Directory," said the spokesman regarding reasons for the delay and the concerns raised at the consultation sessions.

The spokesman also said employers can use existing information in the directory, such as agencies' experience, performance and customer ratings, to select an EA in the meantime. Further enhancements to the directory are being studied.

Case executive director Loy York Jiun said Case is working out the details of the Trustmark scheme with relevant stakeholders.

He encouraged employers to patronise agencies accredited under the CaseTrust Accreditation

12

The number of accredited agencies listed on the CaseTrust website

Scheme for Employment Agencies, which is a voluntary scheme that recognises businesses with consumer-friendly policies and proper dispute resolution procedures, for example.

The CaseTrust website lists 12 accredited agencies as at yesterday evening.

When asked, MOM did not say what criteria it plans to use to grade agencies under Trustmark.

According to documents from

the pilot run seen by The Straits Times, some of the criteria used included having processes in place to help the maid understand the needs of the prospective employer, and offering employers the option of not paying for the maid's placement loan upfront.

Some agents said some of the criteria did not seem practical.

"They want us to state very clearly under what conditions we will provide a refund and how much the refund will be, but we have to decide case by case based on what would be win-win for the agency and employer. We spend a lot of money recruiting the workers," said one agent who asked not to be named.

Association of Employment Agencies (Singapore) president K. Jayaprema said the criteria do not seem to address some of the issues plaguing the industry, such as advertisements offering low "prices" or giving away freebies.

"We are looking forward to Trustmark but we want it to be a very objective way to elevate the industry's professionalism and we hope it will not be too employer-centric," she added.

Although a grading scheme would be a help to first-time employers, it may be hard for MOM to set a yardstick in quantifying certain service standards, said Nacion Employment director Lim Chee Chong.

For instance, he said, retention rates, which are displayed on the ministry's EA directory, are also impacted by the maids themselves, and are not always a sign of the agency's professionalism.

Housewife Janice Kong, 32, who first hired a maid a month ago after going to three different agencies, said a grading system would be helpful to offer some form of industry benchmark.

"Our experience so far in sourcing for an agency was purely through word of mouth, and the outcome was hit or miss," she said.

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Motorbike tolls at Second Link to be scrapped from Jan 21

Cara Wong

Motorcyclists will no longer have to pay tolls when travelling on the Second Link from Jan 21, Singapore's Ministry of Transport (MOT) said yesterday.

The abolition of the 40 cents motorcycle fee when entering or leaving Tuas Checkpoint follows Malaysia's move to stop collecting the RM1.10 (36 Singapore cents) toll from its side of the Second Link yesterday.

"Singapore's longstanding policy is to match Malaysia's toll rates," said a Ministry of Transport spokesman.

Malaysia announced that it would remove tolls for motorcyclists on the Second Link last November and Singapore announced its intention to follow suit days later.

Tolls have been collected from motorcyclists at the Second Link since 1998, when the \$1.3 billion bridge to Johor was opened. Back then, motorcyclists had to pay RM1 (equivalent to 44 Singapore cents then) on the Malaysian side, and another 50 Singapore cents at the Tuas checkpoint.

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A trim first, then to school



Four-year-old Jaime Chen (above) sits in a toy car at the EC House salon while getting a haircut at Compass Point in Sengkang. She is starting K1 classes in kindergarten today.

Meanwhile, at the Sri Nada barber shop (right) in the same mall, six-year-old Jaylen Yap closes his eyes when the barber sprays water to wet his hair. He starts K2 classes today.

With him in the same shop is six-year-old Anaqi Zahin (foreground), who is also having his hair cut before he starts primary school.

Hair salons and barber shops saw brisk business yesterday as children got ready for school, having their hair cut to meet school rules.

The Ministry of Education calendar shows that the first semester for primary and secondary schools, which starts today, will end on Friday, March 15. The last day of school this year for primary and secondary schools is Friday, Nov 15.

ST PHOTOS: NG SOR LUAN





Mr Wang Mao Song, 33, a technician, and Madam Tian Ning Ning, 31, a surgical nurse, with their baby in KKH. Their daughter was born at exactly midnight on New Year's Day and is this year's first baby. She is the couple's first child.



Mr Neo Ching Liang, 33, a casino supervisor, and Madam Lee Hui Ling, 26, a money changer teller, with their son Reyes in Mount Alvernia Hospital. The first-time parents had thought he would be the last baby of 2018. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO

Ringing in the New Year with bundles of joy

First baby born at exactly midnight in KKH, while another arrives just four seconds later in Mount Alvernia Hospital

Cara Wong

As revellers celebrated the start of 2019 yesterday, two couples had extra reason to do so as the clock struck midnight.

This year's first New Year's Day baby was born at exactly midnight in KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) to Madam Tian Ning Ning, 31, a surgical nurse, and Mr Wang Mao Song, 33, a technician.

The girl, who has not been named yet, is the couple's first child and was born after about five hours of induced labour.

Madam Tian and Mr Wang were surprised to have the baby on New Year's Day as Madam Tian was expected to give birth on Dec 30.

When the baby did not arrive, the couple made an appointment to in-

duce labour on New Year's Eve as they were afraid that the delay would be bad for their child.

"When I was pushing the baby out, we were all looking at the clock and it happened to show 12am on the dot," said Madam Tian.

"I could hear people wishing one another Happy New Year outside the delivery ward."

Mr Wang said: "Since she was already over the expected due date, as long as she's healthy, all is good for us."

The two permanent residents married in 2012, and have been planning to have a child for more than two years. They struck up an online romance several years ago while Mr Mao was still working in China. He moved here to join Madam Tian when they planned on getting hitched.

The couple said that they will wait for Mr Wang's parents to pick an auspicious name for their daughter, who weighed in at 2.7kg.

They will receive a hamper of baby products from the hospital for having this year's first baby.

Just four seconds after Madam Tian and Mr Wang's daughter was born, baby boy Reyes Neo was delivered at Mount Alvernia Hospital to first-time parents, Madam Lee Hui Ling, 26, and Mr Neo Ching Liang, 33.

The pair, who met at work and married in 2017, had thought Reyes would be the last baby of 2018, as Madam Lee, a permanent resident who works as a money changer teller, had been admitted to the hospital early on Monday morning.

Reye's birth was extra special for the pair, said Mr Neo, as Madam Lee had a difficult pregnancy.

Doctors had found a blood clot in her placenta in her first trimester and in the later stages of her preg-

nancy, the baby was found to have a high chance of miscarriage or being born with Down syndrome.

"When the baby came out healthy, we were all very relieved and happy," said Mr Neo, a Singaporean casino supervisor, noting that Reyes weighed 3.1kg. "I just hope he will also grow up to be healthy and happy."

Other New Year's Day babies include Hayden Chai, who was born just two minutes after midnight.

The first child of cashier Lee Yean Hee, 31, and lab analyst Chai Vui Choi, 36, was delivered at National University Hospital.

Madam Lee went into labour at 6am on New Year's Eve.

"She was very strong, persevered all the way - she didn't even take any medicine to help her," said Mr Chai.

"I hope the baby will grow up to be a good and understanding kid, and eventually a good man."

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AT THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT

When I was pushing the baby out, we were all looking at the clock and it happened to show 12am on the dot. I could hear people wishing one another Happy New Year outside the delivery ward.

”

MADAM TIAN NING NING, whose daughter was initially expected to arrive on Dec 30 and was born after about five hours of induced labour.

RELIEF AFTER DIFFICULT PREGNANCY

When the baby came out healthy, we were all very relieved and happy. I just hope he will also grow up to be healthy and happy.

”

MR NEO CHING LIANG, whose wife, money changer teller Lee Hui Ling, gave birth to their son Reyes just four seconds after Madam Tian and Mr Wang Mao Song's daughter was born.

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AVA takes temporary custody of animals found at Platinum Dogs Club

Goh Yan Han

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) has taken temporary custody of the animals found during a raid on the Platinum Dogs Club premises in Bukit Panjang, said a spokesman.

Officials entered the pet boarding

facility last Saturday following complaints that animals in its care were mistreated.

They found 18 dogs and a rabbit at the Galistan Avenue house.

The spokesman said: "To safeguard the welfare of the animals, AVA has taken temporary custody of the animals until their owners return.

"We have been contacting owners... and some of the dogs have been reunited with (them)."

Platinum Dogs Club advertises a variety of services on its website, including overnight board for dogs, daycare and grooming.

The site describes the facility as "fully air-conditioned daily", "large and spacious" and "cage-free". It

also says that staff would attend to pets if they needed medical attention.

The Straits Times understands members of the public had complained to the AVA that their pets were ill-treated at the facility and made a police report.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) had also

received complaints.

It is understood that last Saturday's raid was carried out by AVA officers, the police and the SPCA.

A Platinum Dogs Club spokesman told Chinese-language daily Lianhe Wanbao that the facility had not abused any of the pets found during the raid.

Platinum Dogs Club did not reply to further queries from The Straits Times by press time.

Under the Animals and Birds Act, convicted offenders who fail in their duty of care while conducting an animal-related business can be fined up to \$40,000, jailed for two years, or both, said the AVA.

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18

Number of dogs found at the Platinum Dogs Club premises in Bukit Panjang last Saturday.

1

Number of rabbits found there.

New Jurong West market complex opens



A dragon dance group performing at Jurong Central Plaza yesterday. Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam was guest of honour at the official opening of the new \$6.2 million market and community complex. ST PHOTOS: GAVIN FOO

Two-storey Jurong Central Plaza, with an active ageing hub, replaces old market destroyed by fire two years ago

Janice Tai
Social Affairs Correspondent

More than two years after a Jurong West market burned down, its replacement was given its official opening yesterday. The new \$6.2 million two-storey market, eating house and community complex – known as Jurong Central Plaza – is located in Jurong West Street 41, the same site as its predecessor.

The complex features a more spacious, 547 sq m market with 35 stalls and a 437 sq m coffee shop with 13 stalls on the ground floor.

The second storey houses an active ageing hub that consists of a senior activity centre, an eldercare centre and an open space for activities.

In 2016, Lim Ying Siang, then 41, was charged with setting fire to styrofoam boxes at the market at Block 493, with the knowledge that it would likely destroy it.

The fire in the early hours of Oct 11, 2016, razed a wet market and coffee shop to the ground, affecting the livelihood of stallholders and forcing residents to shop elsewhere. A temporary market was constructed opposite Block 495.

"This project started off when we had a big problem," noted Deputy

Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who was guest of honour at the launch of the new complex.

"But this project shows that no problem is too big when we work together with one heart."

Residents said they liked the ventilation and wide corridors in the new complex.

"It is very convenient here because everything is under one roof, but some of the food prices in the coffee shop have gone up," said former taxi driver B. Tan, 76.

Some market stallholders also said their rents seemed to have gone up. Madam Jeo Li Yan, 56, who sells meat, said her rent has risen from \$800 to \$1,200 a month.

Jurong GRC MP Ang Wei Neng clarified that rents per sq m have remained the same but some stall owners may be paying more because they have been allocated a larger space.

The proximity of the market to the active ageing hub, which will start operating in the second quarter of this year, not only makes various services more accessible to the elderly but also allows for collaborations.

For instance, there is an arrangement now for market stallholders to donate meat and vegetables so that volunteers can cook and serve free lunches upstairs for needy senior citizens every Thursday.

Mr Ang said: "Each stallholder will donate about \$5 to \$10 worth of what they are selling so that it is not a lot for each stallholder but it all adds up and enables it to be sustainable and meaningful for residents."

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Above: Vegetable stall helper Tay Quek Hua, 70, helping a customer pack selected vegetables from his stall.

Left: DPM Tharman stopping by at the incense stall of Mr Chian Kwang Huat (in white), 45, and shaking hands with Mr Tan Chai Poh, 76, a frequent customer of the stall.



The second storey of the complex has an open space for activities, such as group dancing. It is part of an active ageing hub that also includes an eldercare centre.

There is an arrangement now for market stallholders to donate meat and vegetables so that volunteers can cook and serve free lunches upstairs for needy senior citizens every Thursday.

Lawyer taking on five high-profile cases this year

Among them are 2017 Woodlands double murder and judicial application to review Section 377A

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

He may not be the best-paid lawyer in town but Mr Eugene Thuraisingam is the lead counsel in five high-profile court cases to be heard this year.

These include a double murder, as well as appeals against the jail terms meted out to prominent businesswoman Jannie Chan and her daughter, Audrey Tay, on unrelated charges.

In June, Mr Thuraisingam, 43, is due to defend Teo Ghim Heng, who is accused of murdering his wife and their four-year-old daughter in the family's Woodlands flat in January 2017. Teo faces a third charge – the alleged killing of an unborn child, as his wife was pregnant when slain.

The bodies of his wife, Madam Choong Pei Shan, and daughter, Teo

Zi Ning, were found eight days after their death in a bedroom in their flat on Jan 28, 2017. Details of the case are expected to surface in court.

In March, Mr Thuraisingam will lead an appeal against the 22-month jail term slapped on Audrey Tay, whose parents are the founders of luxury watch retailer The Hour Glass. She pleaded guilty last year to drug abuse.

Tay's mother, Jannie Chan, is appealing separately against a two-week jail sentence for disobeying a court order that restrained her from defaming and harassing her former husband, Mr Henry Tay.

Mr Thuraisingam will also be involved in two cases that raise questions of law where the decisions can have far-reaching effects.

Later this month, he and lawyer Suang Wijaya will argue a novel appeal involving death row inmate D. Nagaenthran.

The drug offender was not granted a certificate of substantive cooperation by the public prosecutor, which could have enabled the court to spare him from death and jail him for life instead. The issue is whether the court can intervene against the prosecutor's decision on grounds other than bad faith, malice or unconstitutionality.

The other case is a judicial application to review Section 377A of the Penal Code, which criminalises sex between men.

Mr Thuraisingam, who runs a law firm bearing his name, said: "Our mainstay is good commercial litigation but we also have a soft spot for the underdog." He added: "We believe in access to justice for the ordinary person and that is why, where we are able to and there is merit in the case, we do it pro bono. It is our way of giving back to society."

Other cases likely to draw high interest this year include the sentencing of former City Harvest Church leader Chew Eng Han, who was found guilty of attempting to leave Singapore illegally from an unauthorised point of departure, to avoid serving an earlier jail term.

Also expected to be of interest is the case of company director Ng Kheng Wah, who faces multiple charges for allegedly supplying North Korea with prohibited luxury goods worth about \$6 million. Not to mention the high-stakes civil suit involving the founder of Mustafa Centre, Mr Mustaq Ahmad, who is being sued by his step-siblings.

A closely watched case is the civil suit by the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council against Workers' Party Aljunied GRC MPs Sylvia Lim, Low Thia Khiang and Pritam Singh and others for alleged breach of fiduciary duties in appointing FM Solutions and Services as the town council's managing agent. They also face a suit from Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council.

In March, both sides are due to wrap up their arguments with oral submissions in the High Court.

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Additional reporting by Shaffiq Alkhatib



ST FILE PHOTO

FIGHTING FOR THE UNDERDOG

Our mainstay is good commercial litigation but we also have a soft spot for the underdog. We believe in access to justice for the ordinary person and that is why, where we are able to and there is merit in the case, we do it pro bono. It is our way of giving back to society.



LAWYER EUGENE THURAISINGAM (above)

Roads closed due to fire at Tuas waste recycling company

Timothy Goh

Roads were closed and people were advised to stay clear after a fire broke out at a waste recycling company in Tuas yesterday.

The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) said on its Facebook page that it was alerted to the fire, which occurred at 8 Tuas View Circuit, around 9.40am.

The fire involved plastic waste and tyres, and was found to be burning strongly when the SCDF arrived.

A total of 13 emergency vehicles and about 55 firefighters were deployed.

At the height of the operation, eight water jets and an unmanned firefighting machine were used to bring the fire under control.

Foam was also used during the operation.

Damping-down operations were carried out later.

The police announced that several roads in the surrounding area were closed to facilitate the firefighting operations, including stretches of Tuas South Avenue 7, Tuas South Avenue 3 and Tuas South Avenue 8.

There were no reported injuries and the cause of the fire is under investigation.

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Above: Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) officers using water jets to contain the fire.

Far left and left: SCDF deployed 13 emergency vehicles and about 55 firefighters. At the height of the operation, eight water jets, foam and an unmanned firefighting machine were used. PHOTOS: SCDF/FACEBOOK

More e-mail scams related to porn being reported

Goh Yan Han

The police have received more complaints about pornography-related e-mail extortion scams, with around 70 cases reported since September last year.

From September to October last year, more than 15 police reports were made.

Giving an update on Facebook on Monday, the police said victims reported receiving e-mails from unknown accounts or accounts that resembled their own.

The scammers would claim they had screenshots of the victims watching pornographic materials, and would threaten to expose them to their family and friends unless they made a bitcoin payment.

In some cases, victims were told their computers had been infected with malware, which allowed their online activities to be monitored.

In other cases, scammers claimed that they had the victim's e-mail account password, or had obtained the victim's contacts from social networking platforms, to add credence to their threats.

The police advised the public to be wary of such e-mails and to ignore any instructions to make payments. They also urged the public to protect their e-mail accounts by using strong passwords, two-factor authentication and updated anti-virus software.

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Mrs Iris Vergheze was a health worker with the former Middle Road Hospital. Over the past three decades, she has counselled countless HIV/Aids patients and their families, as well as raised funds for HIV prevention. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN



Above: Mrs Vergheze (top row, fourth from left, in purple) with her Middle Road Hospital colleagues. The hospital was designated to handle Aids cases at the time. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF IRIS VERGHESE



NO PROPER CLOSURE

When the patients died, their bodies had to be cremated or buried within 24 hours. People had no time to even grieve; there was no closure. I cried so much when they died. They were humans and not just some digits.

MRS IRIS VERGHESE, on how hard it was to deal with the deaths of HIV/Aids patients.



Above, left: Mrs Vergheze outside the venue for an international Aids conference in Durban, South Africa, in 2000.

Left: Mrs Vergheze on holiday with her sons Chris (in blue), now 46, and Kevin, now 43, as well as her husband Martin, now 74, in Sydney in 1987.

The Lives They Live

SHE REACHED OUT TO AID PATIENTS WHEN NO ONE WOULD

While the pioneer leaders were the original architects of Singapore, everyday heroes helped build society here. This is another story about such people in the series, The Lives They Live.

Rahimah Rashith

The year was 1985. Singapore had just discovered its first cases of Aids.

At the former Middle Road Hospital, which was designated to handle Aids cases at the time, two doctors resigned and 25 nurses requested to be transferred out of fear, but not Mrs Iris Vergheze.

"The humiliation connected to the disease was horrible. People did not want to come close to them, let alone touch them," she said, referring to the Aids patients.

But Mrs Vergheze, a health worker with the hospital, offered

comfort and a shoulder to cry on for patients with Aids.

She went on to dedicate much of her life to helping people with Aids and HIV, the virus that causes Aids.

Over the past three decades, she has counselled countless HIV/Aids patients and their families, as well as raised funds for HIV prevention.

Mrs Vergheze was recently featured in a short film called Plague, directed by Boo Junfeng and dedicated to the Action for Aids charity.

The film is part of the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre's 15 Shorts project, which features 15 Singaporeans who went to extraordinary lengths to help others.

"I never in my life thought that I would have to deal with a disease like Aids that no one knew much about back then," Mrs Vergheze, now 72 and retired, told The Straits Times.

She was born in 1946 to a Eurasian mother and a Chinese father and grew up in Kampung Baru.

After graduating from CHIJ Katong Convent, she joined the Singapore General Hospital as a nurse and tended to patients such as those with heart problems.

She quit her job after getting married in 1971, and gave birth a year later to the first of her two children.

In 1974, she got bored and decided to join Middle Road Hospital as a health worker.

In her new job, the former convent school girl was tasked with going to Geylang to trace people who had sexually transmitted infections (STI). This often took her to brothels and nightclubs in the red-light district.

"If someone has an STI, we will find out who they may have passed it on to. We will trace them at the brothels, nightclubs or homes and ask them to come down for treatment," she said.

Mrs Vergheze kept a friendly rapport with the nightclub managers and brothel keepers so that she would be able to meet the patients.

"Going into the nightclubs, I would always find myself in odd situations," she said, adding that her husband Martin, a PSA training officer two years older than her, would accompany her.

She said: "All sorts of things happened in the bars. When they saw me coming, they would switch on all the lights to be alert."

Mrs Vergheze said it was difficult to tell people they had STI or HIV.

She said: "They reacted angrily. One woman at the bar screamed at me. She threw all the vulgarities at me, some that I did not even know existed. I just let them vent. I told them it was okay and that I wanted to help them."

Part of Mrs Vergheze's job as a health worker was to counsel people who had contracted STI.

In 1985, she started to counsel Aids patients as well.

"In the early days, I was doing it

alone. The doctors asked me, 'Are you not frightened? We do not know anything about it too'. They told me to stop being a hero," she said.

The first case she handled was a homosexual man in his early 30s, she said, adding that she will never forget him.

"In 1985, they just sent me to him. There was no information, nothing at all about Aids," she added.

"He came to me and started crying and he leaned forward. I did the only natural thing. I just held him. I could not push him away," said Mrs Vergheze, adding that her shoulder pads were soaked in tears.

"At that point, I remembered how Mother Teresa cared for the lepers but was never infected."

The man died about five years later.

Mrs Vergheze and her husband started a family support group in the late 1980s for HIV/Aids patients and their families to seek comfort and support from one another.

Around the same time, she started attending seminars and conferences around the world, in a bid to tackle the stigma and misinformation surrounding Aids and HIV in Singapore by sharing information about the disease.

Even after retiring four years ago, Mrs Vergheze still catches up with her patients and their families.

"When someone has HIV, you have to talk to them about how to live life and how to die," she said.

"When the patients died, their bodies had to be cremated or buried within 24 hours. People had no time to even grieve; there was no closure," she said.

She added: "I cried so much when they died. They were humans and not just some digits."

To cope, Mrs Vergheze folded a paper star into a white heart-shaped box with red ribbon for every patient she knew who died. She folded around 800 stars.

"I guess the box was like a coffin. It helped me cope," she said. "I kept them for many years. When I retired, I burned them up. It was my way of saying goodbye to them."

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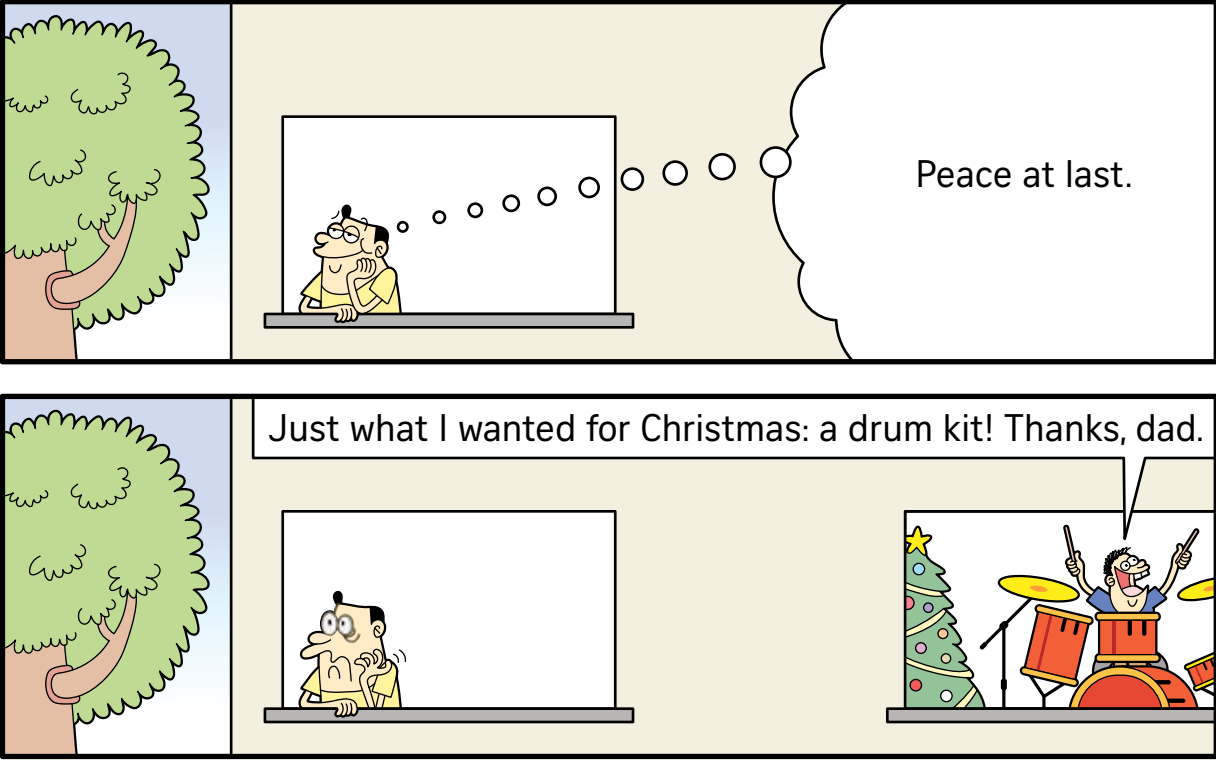
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FORUM

chee chan's TAKE

Dec 2018:
AVA removed noisy mynahs from a tree in Potong Pasir



Renewal of bus services needed too

It is heartening to see that the North-East Line is going for a major renewal this year (NEL to undergo major renewal from January; Dec 17, 2018).
The maintenance and upgrading of the MRT lines are critical.
Many Singaporeans depend on the public transport system to travel.

But, we should not forget about the buses.
The bus contracting model was first introduced in 2014 to be more responsive to changes in ridership patterns and commuter needs.
The Land Transport Authority (LTA) is the owner of all the bus assets and bus operators are to conform to specific

performance standards.
While many indicators such as on-time adherence and waiting times do count as commuters' primary concerns, I hope we are also not forgetting about maintenance and upgrading, especially now that commuters are charged extra to account for a new component called the Network Capacity Factor, which saw bus and train fares for adults rising by six cents per trip

from Dec 29.
There are several buses that can be heard from a couple of bus stops away, especially some used for services 51 and 143. These are usually the older buses.
Although the buses do not run very fast, the roar from the engines is tremendously loud.
While a certain amount of noise is tolerable, there should be a check for noise pollution.
Feedback to bus operators is also

tedious and not uniform across the different operators. Feedback to LTA will just be channelled back to the operators.
The bus contracting model can be enhanced further to include not just waiting times but also other environmentally linked factors such as noise pollution and carbon emissions.
Feedback channels should also be uniform and centralised.
Desmond Teo

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Time to relook DSA scheme

Senior education correspondent Sandra Davie in her Sunday Times commentary highlighted two groups of people who failed to thrive in the Integrated Programme (IP) system (The shame of dropping out of the Integrated Programme; Dec 30, 2018).
One of them comprises students who entered the schools via the Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme through their co-curricular achievements.
What she highlighted supports my view about gaining admission into elite schools through DSA. Clearly, many DSA students cannot cope with the academic rigour of the schools.
According to the commentary, there appears to be a great divide between the DSA students and those who enrolled using their PSLE scores. The former feel ashamed of their DSA status and suffer from low self-esteem.
This leads me to question: Is the DSA scheme really such a

good idea?
One of the reasons given for the DSA scheme is the bid to increase the school's diversity, but what is the point of greater diversity if it is at the expense of young students' sense of self-worth?
How does the DSA scheme even benefit students?
I believe there is nothing inherently wrong with the IP and, in fact, it has been successful for the majority of students who go through it.
Those who enrolled through DSA experience difficulties in the IP because it is not suitable for them.
I urge the Ministry of Education to revisit the rationale for the programme, and re-evaluate the usefulness and the need for the DSA scheme.
At the same time, I hope parents do not force their children to enter IP schools just for "face", but consider their children's abilities and interests as well.
Chong Sze Kah (Madam)

Our learning culture needs a reset

It is alarming to learn that our education system has given rise to students who feel "ashamed" when they fail the Integrated Programme and that some even chose to go overseas to escape the stigma of failure (The shame of dropping out of the Integrated Programme; Dec 30, 2018).
It is equally disconcerting to read that a student could resort to sabotaging another team's project work just to stay ahead.
What values are we imparting to these students who are supposed to be the creme de la creme?
These are students who may become the leaders of tomorrow. The education system here has been labelled a sterling success and ranked internationally as among the best in the world but, to students, it has degenerated into a nightmarish realm of competitive back-stabbing; a high-pressure environment where success is feted and failure makes one doomed for life.
It is clear that the system has deviated from its purported path of helping students to enjoy their learning journey. This does not augur well for a system that is tasked to produce students who are innovative and creative.
It leads to the question: How do we spawn the next Albert Einstein, Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg when students do not even embrace the importance of failure?
Education should be a holistic, positive experience that prepares students well before they step into adult life. When a system produces students who are ashamed of failure or who feel stigmatised by the result, it has failed.
It requires nothing less than a paradigm shift in thinking to reset our learning culture and make our education system wholesome again.
Seah Yam Meng



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Capturing life in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh were The Straits Times' associate editor Rahul Pathak (left), artist Pradip Kumar Sikdar (middle), and executive photojournalist Kua Chee Siong. The ST team spent nine days in the Rohingya camps in July 2018.



Diversification key to tackling food challenges

How is it possible to allocate more land for vegetable farming without compromising on our infrastructure and housing (S'pore must become self-sufficient in food by Dr George Wong Seow Choon; Dec 27, 2018)?

To do so would mean that Singapore must set aside more land for farming.

That may mean less land for housing and, thus, Singapore's population must be reduced.

Are we prepared for that?

The question is not about self-sufficiency but the price of the food.

Are taxpayers prepared to pay for

expensive technology to improve agriculture productivity?

Self-sufficiency does not guarantee food security.

Food security as a concept does not distinguish between food that is imported from abroad and that which is grown domestically.

It is about whether people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient food.

Singapore is deemed food-secure because we import a lot of it, hence the need for a strong Singapore dollar and diversified supply chains.

The duty of the Government is to ensure that people earn enough to

buy food from the open market.

Our limited land is best used for industries that provide employment so that people can afford to feed themselves.

Singapore is not sitting idle on food security. There are many big corporate groups partnering foreign companies on farming and food production projects.

Diversification helps Singapore tackle food challenges. This is the way forward to ensure a resilient supply.

And the population can do its part too: Ensuring food sufficiency also requires minimal food wastage.

Cheng Choon Fei

Diversification helps Singapore tackle food challenges. This is the way forward to ensure a resilient supply. And the population can do its part too: Ensuring food sufficiency also requires minimal food wastage.

Inefficient use of escalators

I agree that users of escalators should act responsibly and that most accidents are caused by errant behaviour (Users the main cause of escalator incidents; Dec 21, 2018).

At MRT stations, I have noticed that users generally move to the left side of escalators so as to leave the right side as a "fast lane" for other users.

This practice, although laudable from the perspective of being courteous, could possibly pose several problems.

The escalators are not used efficiently, especially during peak hours, with congestion on the left side and the right side practically empty.

Users who walk up the "fast lane" could pose a potential safety hazard should they slip while walking up.

Another potential safety hazard is from other users trying to move aside while the escalators are moving.

I suggest that users who are in a hurry take the stairs if they are available, especially during peak hours. They should also refrain from asking users who are in front of them to move aside.

Users should always remain stationary and hold onto the handrails when escalators are moving, irrespective of the side on which they are standing.

Andrew Goh Chor Eng

Here's to a more compassionate society

I was touched after reading the story of Sasha Marimuttu's birthday charity campaign for abandoned animals housed with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) (Celebrate with gifts of giving; Dec 30, 2018).

It gives me hope that the future generation is showing great concern for animals.

This is in contrast to the decision by the authorities to trial a giant bird trap and euthanise mynahs (Major intervention to tackle mynah issue; Dec 29, 2018).

Such extreme measures not only show the failure of government initiatives but also of us citizens as well.

We pride ourselves on being a

society based on justice and equality, but many of us repeatedly infringe such values by knowingly or unknowingly supporting actions that are unjust, such as unnecessary violence against animals.

Thankfully, some people have voiced their sympathy for the mynahs, asserting that they are intelligent animals that do not

deserve to die.

Animal lovers, like Sasha, should continue to be given greater recognition, especially in the media.

Excellent role models will motivate others to be kind and accommodating, leading Singapore to become a more compassionate country.

Subramaniam Jayavelu

Unhappy with SingPost's service standards

I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Sean Lim Wei Xin (SingPost should focus on mail delivery first; Dec 24, 2018).

I have had similar unhappy episodes with Singapore Post's service delivery standards.

I have encountered situations where I was at home the whole day, only to be surprised by a delivery-failure notice at my door stating that the postman was not able to deliver my package.

I also experienced much frustration in trying to redirect my package to another pick-up location, which highlights possible

problems with SingPost's mail-tracking system. I ended up having to pick my parcel up from an inconvenient location.

Lastly, I have also had my fair share of neighbours' letters being wrongly placed in my letterbox.

Singapore customers have a choice of private parcel couriers, but public postal services remain a monopoly, with SingPost as the designated Public Postal Licensee.

Corporate social responsibility efforts are well and good for promoting the image of SingPost, which has also started to ramp up its e-commerce capabilities in recent years.

However, I urge SingPost to uphold its core services first to ensure that it is meeting the basic standards expected of it as a public service provider.

Chua Chun Wei

Is euthanising birds the only solution?

It is sad that mynahs in Potong Pasir were captured and euthanised because they were making a lot of noise (Major intervention to tackle mynah issue; Dec 29, 2018).

I remember the times when many households had roosters that loudly announced the rise of the sun daily.

There were times then when

people waited for birds to flock back home and enjoyed the myriad sounds they made every evening.

They were – and indeed are – music to the ears.

In the name of civilisation and development, we have misused and abused all the natural resources around us.

Society is now trying to

rediscover kampung living and is turning to organic edibles.

This is a good sign but it is time we recognise that we have done enough damage to the planet.

We have encroached into the jungles and displaced flora and fauna. In a small island like ours, it is inevitable for us to expand our dwelling places but with nowhere else to go, birds, squirrels and

rodents do return.

They are then seen as invaders of "our" territory. Once, someone even referred to the chirp of birds as "the worst morning alarm", conveniently forgetting that the birds were once the community's best morning alarms.

In my estate, I see many motorbikes that make a lot of noise. It is worse when they are ridden

under the blocks or revved up inside carparks. The sound echoes and is deafening, and the noise even travels up to the eighth floor of my block.

I have lodged complaints with the town council, Land Transport Authority and National Environment Agency, but to no avail.

If we consider chirping birds

noisy and euthanise them, shouldn't we be stricter on noise pollution by the two-wheelers?

Is euthanising animals the only solution? Aren't there alternative solutions like releasing those birds in places like Pulau Ubin or Sungei Buloh?

I am sure we can think of better solutions for such incidents.

Ramamurthy Mahesh Kumar

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